

## Choosing the Safest Way for Your Child to Ride

Choose a safety seat, booster, car bed, or harness system appropriate for your child's age, size and development. Try before you buy! Make sure it can be firmly installed in all of your vehicles.

### How parents and professionals can make sure children are as safe as possible

- 1) Keep children rear facing until at least age two, longer if possible (check maximum weight of seat). It's five times safer than forward facing! Convertible seats fit up to 30-50 lbs. rear facing.
- 2) Use a seat with a harness as long as possible (40-90 lbs). Check maximum weight of seat.
- 3) Use a booster until the child can pass the 5-Step Test (usually at age 10-12; results vary by vehicle). Riding in a booster is almost twice as safe as wearing just a safety belt.
- 4) Have children ride in the back until they start learning to drive. For children, the back seat is almost twice as safe as the front.

### What parents can do to increase confidence in their choices for their kids

- 1) Recognize each stage of restraint as a demotion, not a graduation.
- 2) When purchasing a safety seat, check the maximum rear-facing and forward-facing weights.
- 3) Learn to assess safety seats in relation to one's own kids, cars, and lifestyles.
- 4) Consider vehicle safety features and recalls.

### Once parents look at seats accommodating bigger kids, here are practical issues to review:

- 1) Fit the chosen product into the vehicle. Will parents move the product from car to car?
- 2) Using the tether is especially important for higher-weight child seats. Get tether anchors retrofitted in older vehicles. Refer to vehicle owner's manual or Safe Ride News LATCH manual for tether anchor limits. Be aware that testing has shown tether use improves performance even if tether fails during crash.
- 3) Install the child seat with a vehicle belt if the child's weight is over the limit for lower LATCH connectors (refer to instruction booklet) or vehicle anchor bars (refer to vehicle owner's manual or Safe Ride News LATCH manual; assume 40 lbs. if not known).
- 4) Check the instruction booklet. For a few seats, the harness is only certified up to 40 pounds.
- 5) Check the top harness slot height to make sure there is plenty of space for your child to grow. The straps must be level with or slightly above the child's shoulders.
- 6) Use the center seating location, if possible.
- 7) Buckle and lock the retractor of any vehicle belts the child can reach to reduce the risk of entanglement in the belt and possible strangulation.

When shopping for a vehicle, consider those with electronic stability control systems and side curtain air bags, which show promise in reducing the number of rollovers and ejections, respectively. Safety belts have been documented as the best tool to reduce vehicle deaths, but several crash avoidance and mitigation features give additional benefit. Be sure to check for recall information for your vehicles.

*Refer to [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org) for lists of safety seats, including products for children with special needs.*

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