Car crashes are the #1 preventable cause of death for children and young adults... as well as a major cause of permanent brain damage, epilepsy, and spinal cord injuries. A sudden stop at 30 miles per hour could cause the same crushing force on your child’s brain and body as a fall from a 3-story building. Fortunately, by buckling up children, we can prevent most of these deaths and serious injuries.

Safety seats save lives and prevent injuries.

I became involved in the field of child passenger safety in 1970 because it was extremely hard to find a safe car seat for my daughter, Kerstin. She ended up riding in a forward-facing seat with a shield at just 5 months of age because only a few seats were crash-tested then. Fortunately, protection for babies and older children is much better today. Kaja and Tavi, my daughter’s twins (cover photo), rode rear facing from birth until they outgrew their seats at about age two. They continued riding in seats with a 5-point harness until they were seven. At age 10, although Tavi is tall for his age, both use boosters for correct belt fit and always ride in the back seat. Stephanie M. Tombrello, LCSW, CPSTI
Executive Director, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

Booster seats reduce injuries by 45% for kids ages 4-8.

“I want to share a brief story about what happened to my son Alex and me, with the hope someone can benefit from our experience. For some reason my son had moved his booster seat into the third row in our van. We were in a hurry, so I sat him without a booster and thought ‘Oh, what will it matter this time.’ As I was about to close the door, I noticed the safety belt was hitting him too high. I stopped and had him crawl into the booster and I reached back to buckle him in. No more than 10 minutes later, we were going through a green light at 45 mph when someone tried to make a left turn in front of us. Our van was totaled in the crash, but I was OK because of my safety belt and air bag and Alex was OK because he was in his booster seat.”
(Adapted from a letter by Catherine Musicant. A picture of Alex in his booster is on the cover.)

(Questions & Answers continued from inside)

Why should children ride in the back seat?
The back seat is almost twice as safe as the front, whether or not the vehicle has air bags. Some research shows that children should ride in the back seat until they reach age 15.

How do I install my child’s car seat?
Check the vehicle owner’s manual and the safety seat instruction booklet to learn about using the safety belt or LATCH system. If you install your safety seat with a vehicle belt, make sure it is buckled and locked (see instructions) to keep it from loosening during normal driving. If you install your safety seat with LATCH, attach the pair of LATCH connectors (usually on a strap) that came with the safety seat to the anchors in the car. Most cars have two pairs of LATCH anchors (small bars in the crack between the seatback and seat cushion) in the back seat. After buckling the belt or attaching the LATCH connectors, press down on the safety seat while tightening the lap portion of the vehicle belt or LATCH strap. To check your installation, hold the safety seat on both sides near the place where the belt or strap is threaded. Push toward the front and sides of the vehicle. It should not move more than one inch. All forward-facing seats should be anchored to the car with the top tether strap, if possible (check instructions).

Should I wear a safety belt while I’m pregnant?
Yes. Too many babies die because of injuries to expectant mothers who fail to buckle up properly. Keep the lap belt low, below the bump. Place the top part of the belt over the shoulder and across the chest, never under the arm. Slide your seat back, as far as possible from the steering wheel, dashboard, or air bag.

What else do I need to know?
Every year, thousands of children are injured or die in parking lots or driveways due to heat stroke, being strangled by a power window, or being run over because they can’t be seen by the driver. Never leave a baby or young child alone in a car or around parked cars. Another risk is from unused safety belts that can be reached by a child. Children have pulled belts all the way out, which makes the retractor lock, and wrapped them around their necks. In a few cases, the child died before the driver could stop the car and cut the belt. Unused belts should be buckled, tightened, and locked, if possible. Finally, make sure that everything in the car – people, groceries, strollers – is buckled up or tied down with cargo straps. Being hit by a loose object or passenger during a crash is a common cause of injury or death.

Call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. for information about child restraints sold by vehicle dealers, car beds for babies who must lie flat, products for children with special needs, air travel.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003
(800) 745-SAFE (310) 222-6860 www.carseat.org

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Producer: Cheryl A. Kim, CPSTI
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CAR SAFETY SEATS

How can I tell if my child’s seat is a “safe” one?
All safety seats must pass crash tests and meet government safety standards. When you buy a new seat, register online or mail in the registration card. The manufacturer will send you a letter if there is a recall. Keep the instruction booklet with the seat and make an extra copy to keep at home. Look for the date the seat was made (on a paper sticker, next to the model number) and write it on your copy.

Are car seats safe?
Avoid buying a used safety seat at a thrift shop or garage sale. It could be missing parts or have invisible crash damage. If you already have a safety seat, be sure that:

- (a) it has stickers with the model number and date made;
- (b) it is not too old – most expire in 6-9 years;
- (c) it has all of its parts, including the instruction booklet;
- (d) it has not been recalled (check the list at www.carseat.org).

### Five Rules for Auto Safety
1. Choose a safety seat that fits your child.
2. Check that it fits tightly in the car.
3. Remove all slack from harness or safety belt.
4. Follow instructions exactly.
5. Buckle up children in the back seat.

### How to Choose and Use Car Safety Seats

#### Newborns and Toddlers
- Face rear as long as possible (until age 2 or more)

#### Young Children
- Use harness & tether as long as possible (check weight & height limits)

#### Older Children
- Use belt-positioning booster until child can pass 5-Step Test (see below).

#### How to Use

- **Safety seat is firmly installed (1-inch test).**
- **Safety seat is tilted about halfway back.**
- **Newborn’s head does not flop forward.**
- **Child’s head is at least 1” below top edge of seat.**
- **Straps are in slots at or below shoulder level.**
- **Harness is snugly woven before adding blankets.**
- **Final step: Chest clip at armpit level.**

#### Errors to Avoid
- **Never** face baby forward.
- **Never** place baby in front of active air bag.
- **Never** use household carrier in car.

#### Which car seat is the “best?”
The “best” seat is the one that...
- Fits your child
- Children should ride facing the back of the car until at least age two.
- The rear is 5 times safer than facing forward.
- Rear-facing-only seats usually have a detachable base.
- Convertible seats fit longer and can be changed from rear facing to forward facing.
- Use a convertible seat rear facing until the child is too heavy (according to weight limit in instructions) or too tall (the child’s head is within an inch of the top edge of seat).
- The next step is a forward-facing convertible seat or a forward-facing-only seat with a harness. When the harness is outgrown, either by weight or height, a booster is needed until the safety belt fits properly. Most kids need a booster until age 10-12.

#### How can I keep my child in the safety seat?
- Start a lifelong habit with baby’s first ride.
- Strengthen the habit by never making an exception.
- Encourage good passengers with praise, singing, games.
- Keep a bag of special soft toys and books in the car.
- Make regular stops to stretch.
- Introduce your child to a new safety seat with a short trip for fun.
- Always wear your own safety belt!

(Continued on back panel)

### Five Rules for Auto Safety

1. Choose a safety seat that fits your child.
2. Check that it fits tightly in the car.
3. Remove all slack from harness or safety belt.
4. Follow instructions exactly.
5. Buckle up children in the back seat.

#### How to Use

- **Safety seat is firmly installed (1-inch test).**
- **Child sits upright or slightly tilted back.**
- **Top tether strap is hooked to anchor in vehicle.**
- **Straps are in slots at or above shoulder level.**
- **Harness is very snug (cannot pinch strap between fingers).**
- **Chest clip is at armpit level.**

#### Errors to Avoid
- **Never** face baby forward.
- **Never** place baby in front of active air bag.
- **Never** use household carrier in car.

#### Which car seat is the “best?”
The “best” seat is the one that…

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(Continued on back panel)