

Car Safety Seat Checkup

Using a car safety seat correctly makes a big difference. Even the right seat for your child's size must be used correctly to properly protect your child in a crash. Here are car safety seat tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Does your car have airbags?

- Never place a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a front passenger airbag. If the airbag inflates, it will hit the back of the car safety seat, right where your baby's head rests, and could cause serious injury or death.
- The safest place for all children younger than 13 years to ride is in the back seat regardless of weight and height.
- If an older child must ride in the front seat, a child in a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness may be the best choice. Be sure you move the vehicle seat as far back from the dashboard (and airbag) as possible.

Is your child facing the right way for weight, height, and age?

- All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car safety seat until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat manufacturer. When infants outgrow a rear-facing-only seat, they should use a rear-facing convertible seat. Most convertible seats have limits that will allow children to ride rear facing for 2 years or more.
- Any child who has outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit for his convertible car safety seat should use a forward-facing seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by his car safety seat manufacturer. Many seats can accommodate children up to 65 pounds or more.

Is the harness snug?

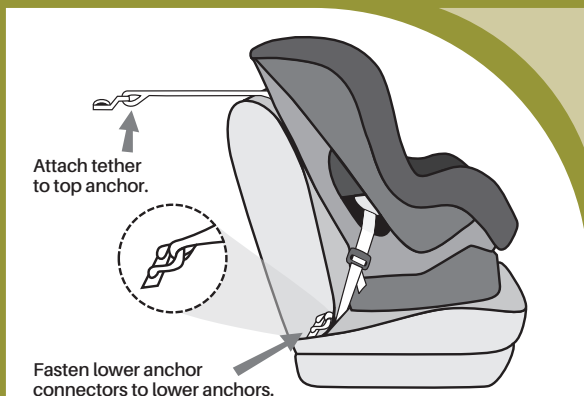
- Harness straps should fit snugly against your child's body. Check the car safety seat instructions to learn how to adjust the straps.
- Place the chest clip at armpit level to keep the harness straps secure on the shoulders.

Does the car safety seat fit correctly in your vehicle?

- Not all car safety seats fit properly in all vehicles.
- Read the section on car safety seats in the owner's manual for your car.

Can you use the LATCH system?

- LATCH (lower anchors and tethers for children) is a car safety seat attachment system that can be used instead of the seat belt to install the seat. These systems are equally safe, but in some cases, it may be easier to install the car safety seat using LATCH.
- Vehicles with the LATCH system have anchors located in the back seat, where the seat cushions meet. All car safety seats have attachments that fasten to these anchors. Nearly all passenger vehicles made on or after September 1, 2002, and all car safety seats are equipped to use LATCH. All lower anchors are rated for a maximum weight of 65 pounds (total weight includes car safety seat and child). Check the car safety seat manufacturer's recommendations for the maximum weight a child can be to use lower anchors. New car safety seats have the maximum weight printed on their label.
- The top tether improves safety provided by the seat. Use the tether for all forward-facing seats. Check your vehicle owner's manual for the location of tether anchors. Always follow both the car safety seat and vehicle manufacturer instructions, including weight limits, for lower anchors and tethers. Remember, weight limits are different for different car safety seats and different vehicles.



Attach tether to top anchor.

Fasten lower anchor connectors to lower anchors.

FIGURE 1.
Car safety seat with LATCH.



FIGURE 2.
Rear-facing-only car safety seat.



FIGURE 3.
Convertible car safety seat used rear facing.



FIGURE 4.
Forward-facing car safety seat with harness.



FIGURE 5.
Belt-positioning booster seat.



FIGURE 6.
Lap and shoulder seat belt.

Is the seat belt or LATCH strap in the right place and pulled tight?

- Route the seat belt or LATCH strap through the correct path. Convertible seats have different belt paths for when they are used rear facing or forward facing (check your instructions to make sure).
- Pull the belt tight. Apply weight into the seat with your hand while tightening the seat belt or LATCH strap. When the car safety seat is installed, be sure it does not move more than an inch side to side or toward the front of the car.
- If you install the car safety seat using your vehicle's seat belt, you must make sure the seat belt locks to keep a tight fit. In most newer cars, you can lock the seat belt by pulling it all the way out and then allowing it to retract to keep the seat belt tight around the car safety seat. Many car safety seats have built-in lock-offs to lock the belt. Check your vehicle owner's manual and car safety seat instructions to make sure you are using the seat belt correctly.
- It is best to use the tether that comes with your car safety seat to the highest weight allowed by your vehicle and the manufacturer of your car safety seat. Check your vehicle owner's manual and car safety seat instructions for how and when to use the tether and lower anchors.

Has your child outgrown the forward-facing seat?

- All children whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their car safety seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly, typically when they have reached 4 feet 9 inches in height and are 8 through 12 years of age.
- A seat belt fits properly when the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, not the belly; and the child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her knees bent over the

edge of the seat without slouching and can comfortably stay in this position throughout the trip.

Do you have the instructions for the car safety seat?

- Follow them and keep them with the car safety seat.
- Keep your child in the car safety seat until she reaches the weight or height limit set by the manufacturer. Follow the instructions to determine whether your child should ride rear facing or forward facing and whether to install the seat using LATCH or the vehicle seat belt.

Has the car safety seat been recalled?

- You can find out by calling the manufacturer or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888/327-4236 or by going to the NHTSA Web site at www.safercar.gov.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for making any repairs to your car safety seat.
- Be sure to fill in and mail in the registration card that comes with the car safety seat. It will be important in case the seat is recalled.

Do you know the history of your child's car safety seat?

- Do not use a used car safety seat if you do not know the history of the seat.
- Do not use a car safety seat that has been in a crash, has been recalled, is too old (check the expiration date or use 6 years from date of manufacture if there is no expiration date), has any cracks in its frame, or is missing parts.
- Make sure it has labels from the manufacturer and instructions.
- Call the car safety seat manufacturer if you have questions about the safety of your seat.

Resources

If you have questions or need help installing your car safety seat, find a certified child passenger safety technician (CPST) by going to the National Child Passenger Safety Certification Web site at <http://cert.safekids.org> and clicking on "Find a Tech."

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers more information in the brochure *Car Safety Seats: Guide for Families*. Ask your pediatrician about this brochure or visit the official AAP Web site for parents, www.HealthyChildren.org/carseatguide.

Figure 1 adapted from US Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *LATCH Makes Child Safety Seat Installation as Easy as 1-2-3*. DOT HS publication 809 489. Published March 2011.

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 by Anthony Alex LeTourneau.

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