

Car Seat Safety

Making sure babies and young kids are in a car seat every time they're in a car can help keep them safe. Use these tips to pick the right seat and use it correctly.

What Are the Types of Car Seats?

Babies start out facing the back of the car in infant-only seats or convertible seats. As they grow, they switch to forward-facing seats and then to a booster seat.

Infant-Only Car Seats

Infant-only seats fit newborns and smaller infants best. They are used only as rear-facing seats (this means the baby faces the back of the car). Infant-only seats are for babies from birth until they reach around 35 pounds (about 16 kilograms), depending on the model. You'll need to use another seat when the baby outgrows the seat.

Infant-only safety seats are convenient because they also can be used as carriers, chairs, or rockers when not used in the car. Many models hook into a base, and the base can stay in the car. Some can be clicked into strollers.

Some things to remember:

- If your baby is in the car seat outside of the car, never leave them unattended and never put the seat on a high surface like a kitchen counter, a dresser, or changing table.
- If your baby falls asleep in the car seat, move them to a safe sleep spot (such as a crib) as soon as possible.
- Don't let your baby spend too much time in the car seat at home or at daycare. Babies need to move as part of their healthy growth and development.

Convertible Car Seats

Convertible seats can be used by babies and young children. Most will work from birth up to 65 pounds (30 kilograms). Some will work for even bigger children. They are used rear-facing or forward-facing, depending on the child's height and weight. Some convertible seats are called "all-in-one" or "3-in-one" because they convert from rear-facing to front-facing to booster with the harness removed.

Convertible seats can save you money because you don't have to buy an infant-only seat. But they can only be used in the car (not as a carrier or seat outside the car). And babies who are very small will fit better in an infant-only seat.

Forward-Facing-Only Car Seats

Forward-facing-only seats are used for kids that have outgrown the weight or height limit for a rear-facing car seat. They can be used only as facing forward seats. They have a harness with a buckle. Some can convert to a

booster seat for older kids and to be used with the car's seat belt.

Booster Seats

A booster seat is a forward-facing car seat that uses the car's seat belt. Kids move into a booster seat when they outgrow the height and weight limits for a car seat.

How Do I Pick a Car Seat?

Many kids of car seats are available, so it can get confusing. When buying a car seat:

- Get a car seat that fits your child's weight, height, and age, as well as your vehicle and use it every time your child is in the car. This tool can help you pick the right car seat.
- Register the seat with the manufacturer so you hear about any recalls.
- Learn how to install the seat and use the harness before your child's first ride.
- To get help or to double-check that you've installed it properly, visit a child car seat inspection station. These are set up by the federal government across the country. Help also is available from many local health departments, public safety groups, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, and fire departments. Be sure to ask for a certified child passenger safety technician.

It's best not to use a secondhand (used) car seat. It may have been in a crash or been recalled for a problem.

How Long Should My Child Face the Rear of the Car?

If you use an infant-only car seats, your baby should stay rear-facing at all times. When your child outgrows the infant seat's height or weight limit, move them to a convertible car seat. **They should stay rear-facing until they reach the highest height and weight limits for the convertible car seat.** Smaller children can stay rear-facing until they are 3 or 4 years old. It's best to keep your child rear-facing as long as possible to help protect their head and neck if a crash happens.

After your child outgrows the rear-facing height or weight limit, you can use a forward-facing seat with a harness. They can move to a booster seat when they outgrow the seats' height or weight limit.

Where Should I Put the Car Seat?

Even if you have the right car seat, where you put it in the car matters:

The safest place for babies and children is in the back middle seat. If needed, you can also put a car seat in the back window seats.

Do not put any kind of infant or child's car seat in the front seat of a car with air bags. If the air bag opens, the child can be seriously injured or killed.

If you have no choice and must place a child in the front (that is, if your car is a two-seater or if the car seat will not fit in the back seat), turn off the airbag and push the seat as far back as it will go.

What Else Should I Know?

Using a car seat is the law in every U.S. state. Car seat and booster seat laws vary by state, so check your state's specific laws.

For more information about keeping kids safe in cars, visit:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- Safe Kids Worldwide

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Date reviewed: March 2023

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