



Car Seat Safety

Pediatric Patient Education Handout

Choose the Right Seat for Your Child

Infants & Toddlers

- Rear-facing in a car seat as long as possible, at least until at least age 2, and preferably until they reach the maximum height or weight allowed by the seat

Preschool & School-Age Children

- Use a forward-facing seat with a harness once they outgrow rear-facing
- Keep the harness until they reach the seat's maximum limits

Booster-Age Children

- Use a belt-positioning booster seat once they outgrow the harness
- Booster is needed until the seat belt fits correctly, usually ages 8–12 and about 4'9" (57 inches) tall

Teens

- Always use a seat belt
- Lap belt low across the hips, shoulder belt across the chest
- Back seat is safest for teens until at least age 13

Proper Car Seat Use

- Install seats in the back seat
- Follow both car seat and vehicle instructions
- Car seat should not move more than 1 inch side-to-side or front-to-back
- Harness straps should be snug (no slack)
- Chest clip at armpit level
- No bulky coats under harness straps

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Turning forward-facing too soon
- Using a booster before the seat belt fits
- Loose harness straps
- Using expired or recalled car seats
- Installing without checking instructions

Cold Weather Tip

- Buckle your child without a bulky coat
- Place the coat or blanket over the harness after buckling

Need Help?

Free car seat safety checks are available:

- Local fire departments
- Police stations
- Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs)

Find a technician at cert.safekids.org

Remember

The safest car seat is one that fits your child, fits your vehicle, and is used correctly every time.

If you have questions about car seat safety, talk with your pediatric provider.