

# Time to Buckle Up ... The Right Way!



Every parent knows never to let a child ride in a car without buckling up in an approved car safety seat. But are you aware that some studies estimate that as many as 80 percent of car safety seats are used incorrectly? That means four out of every five children are riding in improperly installed, poorly fitting and/or damaged seats that may not protect them as designed in the event of a crash.

Even more shocking is the fact that many parents are completely unaware that their child is among those at risk. Before you drive another mile with your kids in the car, review these tips for selecting, installing, and using car safety seats.

## Good, Better or Best?

No one seat is “best” or “safest.” When choosing a car safety seat, remember:

- Cost is not an indicator of quality. All car safety seats available for purchase in the United States must meet very strict safety standards established and maintained by the federal government.
- Fit is key. Before you buy, put your child in the seat and adjust the harnesses and buckles. Also, try installing the seat in your car to ensure it fits properly and securely.

## New Is Better

Avoid a used car safety seat, especially one from a yard sale or thrift shop, because there is no way to know the seat’s history. Most manufacturers recommend that car safety seats only be used for a certain number of years. Car safety seats wear out over time, and older seats may be missing important parts, labels, or instructions. Secondhand seats may have damage that you cannot see, or may have been recalled.

## Size Matters

- Your baby should ride rear-facing until she has reached at least one year of age and weighs at least 20 pounds. At that point, she can face forward; however, it’s best for her to ride rear-facing as long as possible. Convertible seats and some infant-only seats have rear-facing weight limits of 30 to 35 pounds and height limits of at least 32 to 36 inches.
- Once your baby has outgrown the rear-facing weight or height

limit for her seat, she should ride in a forward-facing seat until she outgrows it. If you have used your convertible seat rear-facing, you will need to make some adjustments before using it forward-facing. Be sure to follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

- When she has outgrown her harness-style seat (check the instructions for the forward-facing height and weight limits), she should ride in a booster seat until the seat belt fits properly. This means that the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, the lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, and the child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her knees bent without slouching and can stay in this position comfortably throughout the trip. This is usually when the child reaches about 4’9” and is between 8 and 12 years of age.

## Tight Is Right

When installing any car safety seat, remember: The seat must be buckled tightly into your vehicle and your child must be buckled snugly into the seat. If you can pinch any harness webbing between your fingers, and/or the seat can be moved more than one inch from side to side or toward the front of the car, then you need to tighten it up.

## Read Up on Safety

Always read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions, which outline proper installation and usage. If you don’t have the instructions, contact the manufacturer for a replacement copy.

## Back Seat Is Best

The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. It is especially important never to place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag.

## Call for Help

Still puzzled? A Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician can answer questions and help install your car safety seat. For more information and helpful resources, including links to a CPS Technician locator and list of recalls, visit the AAP Health Topics Web site at [www.aap.org/healthtopics/carseatsafety.cfm](http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/carseatsafety.cfm). ●