

Child Passenger Safety: Car Seats and Booster Seats

Ohio law requires that a child ride in a car seat (and then a booster seat when he has outgrown the car seat) until he is 8 years old, unless the child is 4 feet 9 inches tall. The exceptions are children who are 4 feet 9 inches or taller before they are 8 years old.

Where Your Child Should Ride

Never place a rear-facing infant or child in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger side airbag. This could result in serious injury or death to your child if the air bag inflates. The only time a child can ride in the front seat is when the vehicle does not have a back seat. The air bag must be turned OFF, and the seat must be pushed back as far as it can go. All children under the age of 13 should ride in the back seat. That is the safest place.

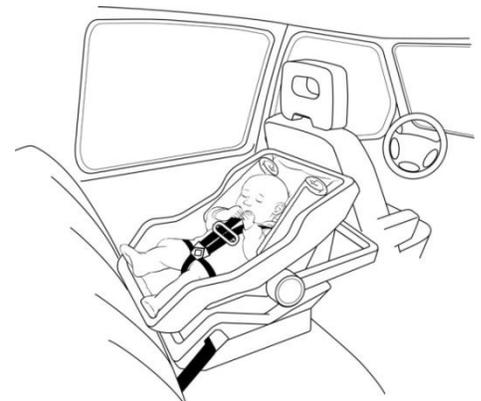
Rear-facing and Forward-facing Seats

AAP's latest guideline, is that **all** children should ride **rear-facing** until they are at least 2 years old or until they reach the weight or height limit of their rear-facing seat. Our hospital supports this recommendation. Many children will outgrow an infant car seat when they are between 20-22 pounds but can remain rear-facing if you move them to a convertible car seat after they outgrow their infant carrier. Many convertible car seats can be used rear-facing for children up to 35 pounds. The rear-facing position offers the best protection for your child. It is important to keep your child rear-facing for as long as the seat allows. Always refer to the car seat owner's manual for height and weight specifications.

How to Place Your Child in the Car Seat

Select the correct car seat for your child's age, weight and height. It is also important that you choose a car seat that fits your vehicle. Always read and follow the instructions that came with the car seat. Also read and follow the instructions in the owner's manual of the vehicle.

- Place your child in the car seat. The child's back and bottom should be flat against the back of the car seat.
- When using a car seat rear-facing, harness straps should be at or below your child's shoulders (Picture 1).



Picture 1 Rear-facing seat

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How to Place Your Child in the Car Seat, continued

- When using a car seat forward-facing, harness straps should be at or above your child's shoulders.
- The harness straps should fit snugly against your child's body. No more than one adult finger should fit in between the child's collarbone and the harness straps.
- The harness clip should be at your child's armpit/chest level. The harness clip keeps the harness straps close and snug on the child's shoulders. The harness clip is a plastic piece that fastens together on the harness straps.
- If needed, support your child's head **with folded towels** or rolled-up receiving blankets on either side of the head. **Never** place anything behind the child's back or under the child's bottom.

How to Install the Car Seat

Read the owner's manual for your vehicle. Follow the instructions for adjusting the seat positions and the seat belts.

- A rear-facing car seat needs to be semi-reclined usually at a 30-45-degree angle so the child's head does not flop forward. Refer to car seat owner's manual for specific instructions regarding correct angle. Many car seats have angle adjusters that can be adjusted to change the angle of the car seat. Most forward-facing car seats should be kept in the upright position. Double check your car seat manual for the angle for your car seat.
- Secure the child restraint in the back seat by routing the safety belt through the car seat according to the instructions that came with the car seat. If your vehicle was made after September, 2002 the LATCH attachment may be used instead of the seat belt. This method of installation is not SAFER, just available in most vehicles.
- Get a tight fit. The car seat should not move more than one inch forward or from side-to-side from where it's attached to the vehicle. If your vehicle was made after October of 1999 look for tether anchors and attach your car seat's tether strap if the seat is forward-facing.



Picture 2 Forward-facing seat

Using a Booster seat Correctly

- A booster seat positions the child so that the seat belt fits correctly: low over the hips and thighs, and snug over the shoulders.
- When your child sits on a booster, if his ears are above the vehicle seat and there is no headrest, he must use a high back booster (Picture 3).
- ALWAYS use the vehicle's lap AND shoulder belt when using a booster seat with high back



Picture 3 Booster seat

Reusing a Child Safety Seat After a Minor Crash

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends that child safety seats be replaced following a moderate or severe crash. However, recent studies have shown that child safety seats do not always need to be replaced after a **minor** crash.

Minor crashes are those that meet **all** of these criteria:

- The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site.
- The vehicle door nearest the safety seat was undamaged.
- There were no injuries to anyone in the vehicle.
- The air bags (if present) did not deploy.
- AND there is no visible damage to the safety seat.

You may also contact the maker of your car seat for further advice.

When Your Child May Use a Seat Belt

- A child should ride in a booster seat until he is 8 years old unless he is 4'9" or taller. Seat belts are for children who are tall enough to sit with their knees bent at the edge of the seat without slouching.
- A child should be able to sit all the way back against the vehicle seat. If he can't do this, he needs a booster seat.
- Lap and shoulder belts should fit low over the hips and upper thighs and snugly over the shoulders. Your child should be able to ride like this for the whole trip.
- **Never** allow children to put the shoulder belts under their arms or behind their backs.

Used Car Seats

Used child safety seats **should not be reused** unless you are certain they have never been in a moderate or severe crash (see **Reusing a Child Safety Seat After A Minor Crash**, above), they have all the pieces including the instructions, and they have been checked for recalls. However, a used car seat is better than no seat at all. **Seats should not be used for more than 6 years. Check the back of your car seat for the SPECIFIC expiration date.**

If you would like more information, please feel free to contact one of Nationwide Children's Hospital's child passenger safety specialists at (614) 722-6524 or call the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.