

# One-Minute Car Safety Seat Check-Up



**A. Infant-only seat**

Using a car safety seat correctly makes a big difference. Even the “safest” seat may not protect your child in a crash unless it is used correctly. So take a minute to check to be sure...

**>> Does your car have a passenger air bag?**

- An infant in a rear-facing seat should NEVER be placed in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the backseat.
- If an older child must ride in the front seat, move the vehicle seat as far back as possible buckle the child properly, and make sure he stays in the proper position as all times.



**B. Rear-Facing convertible seat**

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

- Infants should ride facing the back of the car until they have reached at least 1 year of age AND weigh at least 20 pounds (A and B)
- A child who weighs 20 pounds or exceeds the height limit for the car safety seat before she reaches 1 year of age should continue to ride rear-facing in a car safety seat approved for use at higher weights and heights in the rear facing position.
- A child who weighs more than 20 pounds AND is older than 1 year may face forward (C). It is safest for a child to ride rear facing until she reaches the top weight or height allowed by the seat for use in the rear-facing position.
- Once your child faces forward, she should remain in the car safety seat with a full harness until she reaches the top weight or height allowed by the seat. When changing the convertible seat for use in the forward-facing position, you must make adjustments. Check your safety seat instructions.



**C. Convertible seat turned to face forward**

**>> Is the harness snug; does it stay on your child's shoulders?**

- Harnesses should fit snugly against your child's body. Check the car safety seat instructions on how to adjust the straps.
- The chest clip should be placed at armpit level (C) to keep the harness straps on the shoulders.

**>> Has your child grown too tall or reached the top weight limit for the forward-facing seat?**

- Children are best protected in a car safety seat with a full harness until they reach the top weight or height limit of the car safety seat.
- Once your child outgrows his car safety seat, use a belt positioning booster seat to help protect him until he is big enough for the seat belt to fit properly. A belt-positioning booster seat is used with a lap and shoulder belt (D).
- Shield boosters: Although boosters with shields may meet current Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards for use by children who weigh 30-40 pounds, on the basis of current published peer-reviewed literature, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not recommend their use.
- A seat belt fits properly when the shoulder belt crosses the chest, the lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, and the child is tall enough so that when he sits against the vehicle seat back, his legs bend at the knees and his feet hang down.

**>> Does the car safety seat fit correctly in your vehicle?**

- Not all car safety seats fit in all vehicles.
- When the car safety seat is installed, be sure it does not move side-to-side or toward the front of the car.
- Read the section on car safety seats in the owner's manual for your car.



#### D. Belt-positioning booster seat

##### >> Is the seat belt in the right place and pulled tight?

- Route the seat belt through the correct path (check your instructions to make sure), kneel in the seat to press it down, and pull the belt *tight*.
- A convertible seat has 2 different belt paths, 1 for use rear-facing and 1 for use forward-facing.
- Check the owner's manual for your car to see if you need to use a locking clip. Check the car safety seat instructions to see if you need a tether to keep the safety seat secure.

##### >> Can you use the LATCH system?

- Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH) is an anchor system that allows you to install a car safety seat without using a seat belt.
- Most new vehicles and all new car safety seats have these attachments to secure the car safety seat in the vehicle.
- Unless both the vehicle and all new car safety seat have this system, seat belts are still needed to secure the car safety seat.

##### >> Do you have the instructions for the car safety seat?

- Follow them and keep them with the car safety seat. You will need them as your child gets bigger.
- Be sure to send in the registration card that comes with the car safety seat. It will be important in case your car safety seat is recalled.

##### >> Has your child's car safety seat been recalled?

- Call the Auto Safety Hotline or check the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Web site for a list of recalled seats. (See below.)
- Be sure to make any needed repairs to your car safety seat.

##### >> Has your child's car seat been in a crash?

- If so, it may have been weakened and should not be used, even if it looks fine.
- If you must use a secondhand car safety seat, first check its full history. Do not use a car safety seat that has been in a crash, has been recalled, is too old (check with the manufacturer), has any cracks in its frame, or is missing parts. Make sure it has a label from the manufacturer and instructions.
- Call the car safety seat manufacturer if you have any questions about the safety of your seat.

#### Questions?

Ask your pediatrician, local safety group, or NHTSA. A certified Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician can help you use your child's car safety seat correctly. On the NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline or Web site, you may give your ZIP code to find the nearest CPS Technician.

The NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline  
888/DASH-2-DOT (888/327-4236) (8:00 am to 10:00 pm ET, Monday through Friday)  
[www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/)

The AAP offers more information in the brochure *Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families*. Ask your pediatrician about this brochure or visit the AAP Web site at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is not testing or standard-setting organization, this guide sets forth AAP recommendations based on the peer-reviewed literature available at the time of its publication and sets forth some of the factors that parents should consider before selecting and using a car safety seat.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this brochure. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in the treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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American Academy of Pediatrics  
PO Box 747  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747  
Web site- <http://www.aap.org>

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