



Each year thousands of young children are killed or injured in car crashes. You can help prevent this from happening to your child by always using car safety seats and seat belts correctly.

The following handout is a summary of the AAP guideline on car seat safety. Please see the original at our web site ([www.framighampediatrics.com](http://www.framighampediatrics.com)).

### **Which car safety seat is the best?**

No one seat is the "best" or "safest." The best seat is the one that fits your child's size, is correctly installed, and is used properly every time you drive. When shopping for a car safety seat, keep the following in mind:

- Don't base your decision on price alone. Higher prices can mean added features that may or may not make the seat safer or easier to use. All car safety seats available for purchase in the United States must meet very strict safety standards established and maintained by the federal government.
- When you find a seat you like, try it out. Put your child in it and adjust the harnesses and buckles. Make sure it fits properly and securely in your car. Keep in mind that pictures or displays of car safety seats in stores may not show them being used the right way.

### **Important safety rules**

- Always use a car safety seat. You can start with your baby's first ride home from the hospital.
- Never place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat.
- Set a good example - always wear your seat belt. Help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
- Remember that each car safety seat is different. Read and keep the instructions that came with your seat handy, and follow the manufacturer's instructions at all times.
- Read the owner's manual that came with your car on how to correctly install car safety seats.
- If you need help installing your car safety seat, contact a certified Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician. To locate and set up an appointment, call toll-free at 866/SEATCHECK (866/732-8243) or visit [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org).

### **Rear-facing seats**

All infants should ride rear-facing until they have reached at least 2 years of age **or** reach the weight limit of your particular car seat determined by the manufacturer. There are 2 types of rear-facing seats: *infant-only seats* and *convertible seats*. *Convertible seats* can be used rear-facing for infants, and then converted to a forward-facing position once the child is old enough and big enough to do so safely.

### **Features to look for in rear-facing seats**

- **Harness slots.** Look for seats that come with more than one harness slot to give your baby room to grow. The harnesses should be in the slots at or below your baby's shoulders.
- **Adjustable buckles and shields.** Many rear facing seats have 2 or more buckle positions for growing babies. Many overhead shields can be adjusted as well.
- **Other features.** Angle indicators (built-in angle adjusters that help you get the proper recline) and head support systems are other features that can help you install the seat the right way.

### **Forward-facing seats**

Once your child is at least 2 years of age and meets the manufacturer's weight requirement he can ride forward-facing. However, it is best for him to ride rear-facing until he reaches the highest weight or height limit allowed by the car safety seat. There are many types of seats that can be used forward-facing including convertible seats, built in seats, combination forward-facing/booster seats, and travel vests.

### **Seat belts**

Your child is ready to use lap and shoulder seat belts when the belts fit properly.

- The shoulder belt should lie across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat.
- The lap belt should be low and snug across the thighs, not the stomach.

- The child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her legs bent without slouching and can stay in this position comfortably throughout the trip.

Remember, seat belts are made for adults. If the seat belt does not fit your child correctly, he should stay in a booster seat until the adult seat belts fit him correctly. This is usually when the child reaches about 4' 9" in height and is between 8 and 12 years of age.

### **Other points to keep in mind when using seat belts**

- Never tuck the shoulder belt under the child's arm or behind the back.
- If there's only a lap belt, make sure it's snug and low on the child's thighs, not across the stomach. Try to get a lap and shoulder belt installed in your car by a dealer.
- Never allow children or anyone else to "share" seat belts. All passengers must have their own car safety seats or seat belts.

### **Installing a car safety seat**

There are 2 main things to remember when installing a car safety seat.

- Your child must be buckled snugly into the seat.
- The seat must be buckled tightly into your vehicle.

Ask yourself the following questions to make sure both are done correctly. If you are not sure, check the instructions that came with your car safety seat, or contact a certified CPS Technician for help.

#### **Is the child buckled into the car safety seat correctly?**

- Are you using the correct harness slots?
- Are the harnesses snug?
- Have you placed the plastic harness clip (if your seat comes with one) at armpit level to hold the shoulder straps in place?
- Do the harness straps lie flat?
- Is your baby dressed in clothes that allow the straps to go between the legs? It's OK to adjust the straps to allow for thicker clothes, but make sure the harness still holds the child snugly. Also, remember to tighten the straps again after the thicker clothes are no longer needed.
- Is anything under your baby? Tuck blankets around your baby after adjusting the harness straps snugly. Never place them under your baby.
- Is your child slouching down or to the side? If so, pad the sides of the seat and between the crotch with rolled up diapers or blankets.

#### **Is the car safety seat buckled into the vehicle correctly?**

- Is the car safety seat facing the right direction for your child's age and weight?
- Is the seat belt routed through the correct belt path?
- Is the seat belt buckled tight? If you can move the seat more than an inch side to side or toward the front of the car, it's not tight enough.
- Is your rear-facing seat reclined enough? Your infant's head should not flop forward. If it does, tilt the car safety seat back a little. Your car safety seat may have a built-in recline adjuster for this purpose. If not, wedge firm padding, such as a rolled towel, under the base.
- Do you need a locking clip? They come with all new car safety seats. If the seat belts in your car move freely even when buckled, you need a locking clip. If you're not sure, check the manual that came with your car. Locking clips are not needed in most new vehicles and in vehicles with LATCH system (a set of fixed anchors that attach directly to your car seat without the use of a seat belt).

**Call time: 8:30-9:00 am**  
**[www.framinghampediatrics.com](http://www.framinghampediatrics.com)**