

# Car Seat Basics

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for young children, and properly restrained children have a more than 50 percent greater chance of surviving a crash. When driving with children, always use the appropriate car seat or seat belt.

## The 4 Steps for Keeping a Child Riding Safely

**STEP**  
**1**  
**REAR-FACING**



All babies and toddlers should ride in rear-facing car seats until they are 2 years old or until they reach the highest weight or height limit allowed by the car seat.

**STEP**  
**2**  
**FORWARD-FACING**



All children 2 years or older, or those who have outgrown the weight or height limit of their rear-facing seat, should ride in a forward-facing car seat with a harness for as long as possible up to the highest weight or height allowed by the car seat.

**STEP**  
**3**  
**BOOSTER SEATS**



All children whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle lap/shoulder belt fits properly, typically when the child reaches 4'9" tall at 8–12 years old.

**STEP**  
**4**  
**SEAT BELTS**



When children are old enough and large enough to use the vehicle seat belt alone, always use lap and shoulder belts for optimal protection.

**ALL CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 13 YEARS OLD SHOULD BE RESTRAINED IN THE REAR SEAT OF VEHICLES.**

*Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, Policy Statement, April 2011*

To learn more or locate a certified child safety technician, visit [NHTSA.gov](http://NHTSA.gov).

# Common car seat mistakes and how to avoid them

**More than 70 percent of car seats are not installed properly.  
Most common errors are easy to fix with just a few adjustments.**

## **THE HARNESS STRAPS ARE NOT TIGHT ENOUGH.**

- Harness straps should fit snug to the child's body and should pass the "pinch test," meaning you should not be able to pinch any excess strap material.

## **THE CAR SEAT ISN'T INSTALLED TIGHT ENOUGH.**

- Car seats, whether installed with the seat belt or LATCH system, should not move more than one inch from side to side when tested at the point where the car seat attaches to the vehicle.

## **MOVING CHILDREN TO THE NEXT STEP TOO SOON.**

- Children should stay in their car seats until they outgrow the height or weight limit of the seat before moving to the next step, such as rear-facing to forward-facing.

## **THE CHEST CLIP IS TOO LOW.**

- The chest clip should be secured at the child's armpits to ensure straps remain in the correct position.

## **PUTTING KIDS IN THE FRONT SEAT TOO EARLY.**

- Children should ride in the back seat of the vehicle until they reach 13 years old. The force of an air bag may be too intense for children under the age of 13.

### **TIPS FOR BUYING CAR SEATS**

You should never purchase or borrow a used car seat that:

- Has been involved in a crash
- Has been recalled
- Has no date of manufacture and/or model number
- Has expired (typically after six years)
- Is damaged or missing parts

**Car seats should not be purchased at garage sales or second-hand stores since the history of the seat is unknown.**

### **MICHIGAN CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY LAWS**

Michigan law requires all children younger than age 4 to ride in a car seat in the rear seat if the vehicle has a rear seat. In addition:

- If all back seats are occupied by children under 4, then a child under 4 may ride in a car seat in the front seat.
- A child in a rear-facing car seat may only ride in the front seat if the air bag is turned off.
- Children must be properly buckled in a car seat or booster seat until they are 8 years old or 4'9" tall.
- All passengers under 16 years old must use a seat belt in any seating position. All front seat occupants must use a seat belt regardless of age.

Children should never ride on a lap, in a portable crib, or in any other device not approved for use in the vehicle.



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