

PRESS RELEASE

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The Perfect Gift: Your Child's Safety

TORRANCE, CA (January 10, 2006) – Every state has a law that requires kids to be buckled up in the car, but most parents don't realize they can greatly reduce their children's risk of injury by going beyond the minimum requirements of the law.

For example, many states permit children to wear just a safety belt after age three or four, but a recent study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia shows that using a booster instead of a safety belt reduces injury by about 60% for children between ages four and eight.

According to Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., most children need to continue using a booster until they are ten years old or more, depending on how they fit in the vehicle seat and belt system. "To find out if a child is ready for a safety belt, parents and caregivers should try the 5-Step Test."

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If the answer is "no" for any of these questions, the child still needs a safety seat or booster.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends that children ride in the back seat until they are old enough to learn to drive. Although current vehicle models have advanced air bags with reduced power and automatic cutoff switches to protect child passengers, the back seat is approximately one-third safer than the front.

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The organization also recommends that children ride facing the back of the car until they are two years old. According to preliminary results of a study presented at a recent meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics, facing rearward up to age two is twice as safe as facing forward. Most babies outgrow the typical infant seat, the type that usually has a carry handle, when they are six to nine months old. The next step is a larger, “convertible” seat, which can be used facing either rearward or forward. As long as the child is under the maximum rear-facing weight limit (30 pounds for most convertible seats) and the top of the head is slightly lower than the top edge of the seat, the child should continue riding rear facing.

Even well-educated, safety-conscious parents often select the wrong type of safety seat, install it incorrectly, or make other errors that can result in serious injuries to their children. More than 90% of the safety seats inspected at voluntary checkups last year were not safe for the child or needed adjustment. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. has a variety of helpful resources for parents, advocates, and Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians who inspect car seats and teach parents how to use them correctly.

The organization has created a CD with a compilation of instructions for every car seat made from 1996 through September 2005. Included are 260 sets of instructions and, for each one, a summary sheet highlighting the most important information for quick reference.

“The Perfect Gift: Your Child’s Safety” is a brochure, available in English or Spanish, that describes how to choose car seats and use them correctly. A list of current safety seat models is included. Another brochure, “Safety Belt Roulette,” uses humor to demolish the common myths non-belt wearers use to justify taking that risk. Both are available from SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

For more information, a car seat checkup online, or to request educational materials, go to www.carseat.org or call the Safe Ride Helpline: (310) 222-6860 or (800) 745-SAFE. For assistance in Spanish: (310) 222-6862 or (800) 747-SANO.

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