

Basic Guidelines for Transporting Children Safely

1. All children ride in the back seat!
2. Never put an infant in front of an active air bag, even if there is no back seat in the vehicle or the back seat is full of other children.
3. A safety belt* is needed for every adult and child (with or without a safety seat) in the car.
4. Read the manufacturer’s instruction manual and follow it exactly.
5. If there is only one child in the car, put her in the center rear, if possible to do so correctly.
6. Use a rear-facing safety seat as long as possible (based on weight and height limits), at least until age two.
7. Use a safety seat with a harness as long as possible, at least until age 3-4, preferably until 6 or 7.
8. Install the safety seat securely. Check: correct belt location, no slack in belt, belt locked*, push test (less than 1” sideways or toward front of car).
9. Secure the child in the harness snugly. Try the pinch test (if you can pinch a fold in the strap, it is too loose).
10. If the child is too big for a safety seat with a harness, use a booster unless the child can pass the 5-Step Test.
11. Proper fit of safety belt (with or without booster): Lap belt touches thighs, shoulder belt touches shoulder and chest. Keep it snug.
12. If only a lap belt is available, it is better than nothing. However, boosters cannot be used without a shoulder belt.

| Child’s Age | Type of Seat | Positioning and adjustments |
|--|---|---|
| Infants (up to 6-12 months or more) | Rear-facing-only seat (up to 22-40 lbs.) OR Convertible seat (rear facing up to 30-50 lbs.) | Adjust angle so head does not flop (about halfway back; see instructions). Use strap slots at or below shoulders; chest clip at armpit level. Check location for vehicle belt* (different with and without base). Check instructions for proper position for carry handle. Top of child’s head is at least 1” from top edge of safety seat. |
| Older babies and toddlers (up to age 2 or more) | Rear-facing convertible seat (up to 30-50 lbs.) | Adjust angle according to instructions. Use strap slots at or below shoulder level; chest clip at armpit level. Check location for vehicle belt* (usually different for rear and forward facing). Change to forward facing if head is within 1” of the top edge. |
| Young children (up to age 6 or 7 or more) | Forward-facing convertible or forward-facing-only seat with harness (up to 40-90 lbs.) Attach top tether strap. | Adjust angle according to instructions (upright or slightly reclined). Use strap slots at or above shoulders (may require top slots); chest clip at armpit level. Vehicle belt is routed behind child (may vary; check instructions for location). Change seats if child is above weight limit per instructions or head is not supported to top of ears. |
| Young children (up to age 10-12) | Booster seat with lap and shoulder belt. | Lap belt touches thighs; shoulder belt is on shoulder, not arm. If belt guide/comfort clip is used, make sure shoulder belt stays snug. |
| Older children and teens (must pass 5-Step Test) | Lap and shoulder belt. | Lap belt is as low as possible, not on the tummy. Shoulder belt is on the shoulder, not under the arm or behind the back. If no shoulder belt is available, keep the lap belt low and snug. |

*Safety seats may be attached with vehicle safety belts or LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children).