

“But my child won’t stay in the car seat!”

Ask yourself these questions

- ❖ Are the shoulder straps tight enough? You should not be able to pinch up any slack between your thumb and forefinger. Keep the chest clip at armpit level to hold the straps in place.
- ❖ Does the car seat fit your child? Read the instructions that came with the seat. For maximum comfort and safety, make sure the seat is right for your child’s age, height, and weight.
- ❖ Has your child been riding too long without a break? Plan frequent stops to let children run around. Make sure they’ve had lots of exercise before a long trip.
- ❖ Are you buckled up? Set a good example and protect yourself by buckling up.
- ❖ Could your little one be jealous of an older brother or sister who sits up front? No one likes to feel left out. Besides, all children should ride in the back seat — the safest part of the car.
- ❖ Is someone else letting your child ride unbuckled when you’re not around? The whole family needs to agree that everyone buckles up for safety.

Take the time to encourage good behavior

- ❖ Keep soft toys and cloth books in the car — nothing heavy or with sharp edges that could hurt anyone in a crash. Give out the toys one at a time. Hide the ones your child is tired of—and bring them out again, another day.
- ❖ Sing songs together, or play music your child enjoys.
- ❖ Let your child buckle up a favorite teddy or doll in a spare car seat or toy car seat (available in the doll section of big toy stores). Let them ride next to each other.
- ❖ Use gold stars or other stickers on a wall calendar to keep score of your child’s daily success at staying buckled. At the end of a good day, give a small treat, such as an extra bedtime story, an extra ten minutes at the park, or letting your child phone Grandma to brag about the gold stars. When your child is old enough, let her put the stickers on the calendar by herself.

How to teach new habits

- ❖ Plan an outing to a fun place like the playground or a friend’s house. Tell your child firmly to stay buckled up on the whole trip. Make a happy fuss if your child behaves well.
- ❖ Plan to leave very early for work or anywhere else you drive for a couple of weeks. Each time your child “escapes” from the car seat, immediately pull over and stop the car. Act bored, not angry. Bored parents are boring; but a child may enjoy making you angry! Tell your child the car can’t go till everyone is buckled up again.
- ❖ When your child reaches the “me do it stage” (around age two), let him become the safety officer for the family. He will be thrilled to remind you to buckle up if you happen to “forget.” Teach your child to buckle up without your help, but check that the straps are snug and the buckle is securely latched.
- ❖ Sometimes a parent needs the support of a special person the child admires. Arrange a visit with a local firefighter, police officer, preschool teacher, or older child who will reinforce the “buckle up” message.
- ❖ Cancel fun outings if your child won’t stay buckled up. The next time he or she “escapes,” pull over, act bored, get everyone buckled up again — THEN turn the car around and go straight home.
- ❖ Tell your child you will cancel other treats if necessary — then do it!

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