

Using the Safety Belt Correctly to Secure Your Safety Seat in the Car

To do its job, a child safety seat must be locked against the vehicle seat. If the lap part of the safety belt is not tight or the safety seat slides around on the vehicle seat, your child will not be protected appropriately.

Always read the instructions that come with the safety seat. It is equally important to read the section on safety belts and child safety seats (child restraints) in your vehicle owner's manual.

Which Kinds of Safety Belts are in Your Vehicle?

The vehicle owner's manual tells you which types of lap or lap-shoulder safety belts are in your car and details using them for child safety seats. There are several kinds of **retractors** (a retractor takes up the slack and stores the rolled-up safety belt) and **latchplates** (a latchplate clicks into the buckle). Knowing which kind of safety belt you have determines how to install a safety seat correctly. Starting with the 1996 model year, vehicles **MUST** have safety belts designed to lock safety seats in place for ordinary driving.

A few newer cars have **inflatable safety belts**. Some safety seat manufacturers do not permit their safety seats to be installed with any inflatable belts. Check with the safety seat manufacturer before using an inflatable safety belt to hold a safety seat in place.

How to Check that a Safety Belt **Retractor** can lock a safety seat securely in place

"Switchable" retractors are found on most newer model vehicles. A switchable retractor works well with safety seats. You 'switch' the retractor by slowly pulling the shoulder portion of the safety belt all the way out of the retractor until it goes no farther. When you let the safety belt roll back into the retractor, you will hear clicks, signaling that it locks every inch or so and will hold a safety seat tightly.

"Automatic locking" retractors lock whenever you stop extending the safety belt. To check for an automatic locking retractor, pull out the safety belt from the retractor part way and stop. When you pull on it again, you will find that it is locked. This kind of safety belt will hold the safety seat tightly. To install a safety seat securely with this type of safety belt, buckle the safety seat in place and then take the slack out of the safety belt by pushing down on the safety seat so the webbing is retracted.

"Emergency locking" retractors lock only during a crash or sudden stop. During normal driving, you can pull the belt in and out easily. There are several ways to 'lock' a safety seat in place with this kind of safety belt.

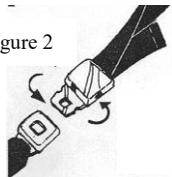
- Some of these safety belts have **locking latchplates** (see below) to lock a safety seat securely in place. Other safety belts (with emergency locking retractors) have **sliding, sewn-on, or dynamic-locking latchplates** (see below). These cannot secure a safety seat alone and need further steps like a **locking clip*** or safety seat with a **lock-off**** to lock a safety seat securely in place.
- Other safety belts with emergency locking retractors in the lap part of the belt stay loose and **REQUIRE** use of a **belt-shortening clip***** to lock a safety seat in place. Safety seat installations with this type of safety belt can be complicated. For assistance, call the Safe Ride Helpline or contact your local Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST).

Steps to Check if a Safety Belt **Latchplate** can lock a safety seat securely in place

Locking latchplates work well with safety seats. They are usually found on lap belts in center rear seats. Lap-shoulder belts also may have them. Some locking latchplates loosen over time or may not 'lock' because the safety belt bends around the safety seat at the buckle (figure 1). With your hand near the location in the safety seat where the safety belt goes



figure 2

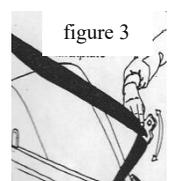


through the safety seat, test for tightness by pulling the safety seat toward the front and sides of the vehicle. If the locking latchplate does not stay tight and the safety seat slides around on the vehicle seat, turn the buckle over, OR twist the buckle up to three times before buckling the safety belt (figure 2). This shortens the belt and lowers the buckle position. This will keep it tightly locked

in most vehicles.

Dynamic-locking latchplates allow webbing of the safety belt to slide through the latchplate freely except in a crash or sudden stop. This alone cannot secure a safety seat. To lock this safety belt, use a **locking clip*** or a safety seat with a **lock-off.****

Sliding latchplates are on one-piece webbing making up the lap-shoulder safety belt and are able to move even when the belt is buckled (figure 3). When this set-up has an **emergency locking retractor** (see above), it cannot secure a safety seat for ordinary driving. It stays loose except in a crash or sudden stop. To secure a safety seat, use a **locking clip*** or a safety seat with a **lock-off.****



Sewn-on latchplates have the lap and shoulder parts sewn separately to the latchplate (figure 4). Check to see if the lap belt can be locked or "switched" to lock (see **automatic retractors** and **switchable retractors**). If not, a **belt-shortening clip***** is needed to take up slack in the lap part of the safety belt and to secure the safety seat in place.



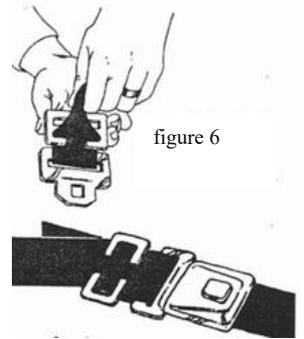
figure 4

***Locking Clip:** Use if the one-piece lap-shoulder belt does not have a switchable retractor or a locking latchplate to keep it tight. A locking clip may be found attached to the back of some safety seats (figure 5). If not, request one from the safety seat manufacturer. It is a clip to keep the safety belt latchplate from moving along the safety belt and loosening in ordinary driving. The clip keeps the latchplate from moving on the belt so that the safety seat is securely in place in case of a crash or sudden stop.



To install the locking clip

1. Put the safety belt through the correct path on the safety seat and buckle it.
2. Push down on the safety seat. Pull the lap belt tight.
3. Pinch the two parts of the safety belt (lap and shoulder) together near the latchplate and unbuckle it.
4. Thread the safety belt (lap and shoulder together) through the locking clip close to the latchplate, (figure 6) and buckle the safety belt again.



If the clip is attached correctly, the safety belt will now hold the safety seat securely in place. ALWAYS remove the locking clip when the safety belt is not holding a safety seat.

****Safety seats with a lock-off:** Check the manufacturer's instructions to determine if the safety seat has a lock-off. If it does, most lock-offs are built into the safety seat. At least one safety seat comes with a lock-off that is a separate loose piece. A lock-off (when used correctly with a safety belt) holds the safety seat tightly in place.

*****Belt-Shortening Clip:** If the lap belt or lap-shoulder belt with a sewn-on latchplate cannot be locked or "switched" to lock (see *switchable retractors* and *automatic retractors*), you must shorten the safety belt to make it the right length to hold your child safety seat tightly. A belt-shortening clip is available from some dealers but is often difficult to find. Call the Safe Ride Helpline if you need such a clip and instructions.

WARNING: Use ONLY a belt-shortening clip to take slack from a lap belt. Use of a locking clip to do this would put your child in danger in a crash. The locking clip could bend and release the safety belt, leading to possible serious injury. A belt-shortening clip looks similar to a locking clip but is made from extra-strong metal. If you buy a belt-shortening clip from a car manufacturer, label it with a permanent marker so you will know which kind of clip it is.

Other Vehicle Features That May Affect Safety Seat Installation

Contoured Bucket Vehicle Seats have hollows and humps that prevent some safety seats from resting flat on the cushion and may not allow your child's safety seat to be attached tightly against the vehicle seatback. Test your child's safety seat for security. With your hand near the location on the safety seat where the safety belt goes through it, test for tightness by pulling the safety seat toward the front and sides of the vehicle. If the base moves more than one inch, use another position, if possible, or find a safety seat with a base that fits better on the vehicle seat.

Safety Belts Anchored Forward of the Vehicle Seatback that come out of the vehicle seat cushion or from the side of the vehicle seat may not hold your child's safety seat tightly against the vehicle seatback. Test your child's safety seat for security by pulling it forward and sideways at the belt path. If the base moves more than one inch, use a different vehicle seating position or find a safety seat with a belt path that fits better with the safety belt position.

Automatic Safety Belts are found in the front seat of some older vehicles, often attached to the door. They automatically wrap around you when you close the door. Others have a motor which moves them along a track above the door when you turn on the vehicle. The best way to avoid problems with these safety belts is to buckle up children in the back seat. Automatic safety belts should never be used to secure a child safety seat. Refer to your vehicle owner's manual and call the Safe Ride Helpline for more information.

WARNING: Children age 15 and under should ride in the back seat. Infants must never be placed in a seat with a frontal air bag. If there is not another seating position available in the vehicle, the front air bag has a switch that must be shut off. You may need to get in touch with the car dealer to shut off the air bag if you cannot find the switch. Side air bags and curtain air bags help protect properly buckled-up children. Never use safety seats on side-facing or rear-facing vehicle seats.

If you have questions about how to use locking clips or belt-shortening clips or other ways to keep child safety seats tightly secured in your vehicle, call the Safe Ride Helpline, 800/745-SAFE.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 www.carseat.org
800/745-SAFE (English) 800/747-SANO (Spanish)

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