

owner's manual that comes with your car safety seat will tell you the height and weight limits for the seat. As a general guideline, a child has outgrown his forward-facing seat when any one of the following is true:

- He reaches the top weight or height allowed for his seat with a harness. (These limits are listed on the seat and also included in the instruction booklet.)
- His shoulders are above the top harness slots.
- His ears have reached the top of the seat.

Types of booster seats

Booster seats are designed to raise the child up so that the lap and shoulder seat belts fit properly. High-back and backless booster seats are available. They do not come with harness straps but are used with the lap and shoulder seat belts in your vehicle, the same way an adult rides. Booster seats should be used until your child can correctly fit in lap and shoulder seat belts. Booster seats typically include a plastic clip or guide to help ensure the correct use of the vehicle lap and shoulder belts. See the instruction booklet that came with the booster seat for directions on how to use the guide or clip.



Figure 4: Belt-positioning booster seat

Installation tips for booster seats

Booster seats must be used with a lap and shoulder belt. When using a booster seat, make sure

- The lap belt lies low and snug across your child's upper thighs.
- The shoulder belt crosses the middle of your child's chest and shoulder.

Common questions

Q: What if my car only has lap belts in the back seat?

A: Lap belts work fine with infant-only, convertible, and forward-facing seats. If your car only has lap belts, use a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness and higher weight limits. Other options are

- Check to see if shoulder belts can be installed in your vehicle.
- Use a travel vest (some can be used with lap belts).
- Consider buying another car with lap and shoulder belts in the back seat.

Q: Is there a difference between high-back and backless boosters?

A: Both types of boosters are designed to raise your child so the seat belts fit properly and both will reduce your child's risk of injury in a crash. High-back boosters are useful in vehicles that do not have head rests or have low seat backs. Many seats that look like high-back boosters are actually combination seats. They come with harnesses that can be used for smaller children and can then be removed for older children. Backless boosters are usually less expensive and are easier to move from vehicle to vehicle. Backless boosters can be safely used in vehicles with headrests and high seat backs.

Older children—seat belts

Seat belts are made for adults. Your child should stay in a booster seat until adult seat belts fit correctly (usually when the child reaches about 4 feet 9 inches in height and is between 8 and 12 years of age). When children are old enough and large enough to use the vehicle seat belt alone, they should always use **Lap and Shoulder Seat Belts** for optimal protection.



Using a seat belt

1. An adult seat belt fits correctly when
 - The shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat.
 - The lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, not the belly.
 - Your child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her knees bent without slouching and can stay in this position comfortably throughout the trip.
2. Other points to keep in mind when using seat belts include
 - Make sure your child does not tuck the shoulder belt under her arm or behind her back. This leaves the upper body unprotected, putting your child at risk of severe injury in a crash or with sudden braking.
 - Never allow anyone to “share” seat belts. All passengers must have their own car safety seats or seat belts.

Common Questions

Q: I've seen products that say they can help make the seat belt fit better. Should we get one of these?

A: No, these products should not be used. In fact, they may actually interfere with proper seat belt fit by causing the lap belt to ride too high on the stomach and making the shoulder belt too loose. They can even damage the seat belt. This rule applies to car safety seats too; do not use any extra products unless they came with the seat. There are no federal safety standards for these products and until there are, the AAP does not recommend they be used. As long as children are riding in the correct restraint for their size, they should not need to use any additional devices.

Shopping for car safety seats

When shopping for a car safety seat, keep the following tips in mind:

- No one seat is the “best” or “safest.” The best seat is the one that fits your child’s size, is correctly installed, fits well in your vehicle, and is used properly every time you drive.
- Don’t decide by price alone. A higher price does not mean the seat is safer or easier to use.
- Avoid used seats if you don’t know the seat’s history. Never use a car safety seat that
 - Is too old. Look on the label for the date it was made. Check with the manufacturer to find out how long it recommends using the seat.
 - Has any visible cracks on it.
 - Does not have a label with the date of manufacture and model number. Without these, you cannot check to see if the seat has been recalled.
 - Does not come with instructions. You need them to know how to use the seat.
 - Is missing parts. Used car safety seats often come without important parts. Check with the manufacturer to make sure you can get the right parts.
 - Was recalled. You can find out by calling the manufacturer or by contacting the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Vehicle Safety Hotline at **888/327-4236**. You can also visit the [NHTSA Web site](#).
- Do not use seats that have been in a moderate or severe crash. Seats that were in a minor crash may still be safe to use, but some car safety seat manufacturers recommend replacing the seat after any crash, even a minor one. The NHTSA considers a crash minor if all of the following are true:
 - The vehicle could be driven away from the crash.
 - The vehicle door closest to the car safety seat was not damaged.
 - No one in the vehicle was injured.
 - The air bags did not go off.
 - You can’t see any damage to the car safety seat.

If you are unsure, call the manufacturer of the seat. See "[Manufacturer phone numbers and Web sites](#)" for manufacturer contact information.

About air bags

Front air bags

All new cars come with front [air bags](#). When used with seat belts, air bags work very well to protect teenagers and adults. However, air bags can be very dangerous to children, particularly those riding in rear-facing car safety seats, and to preschool



and young school-aged children who are not properly restrained. If your vehicle has a front passenger air bag, infants in rear-facing seats must ride in the back seat. Even in a relatively low-speed crash, the air bag can inflate, strike the car safety seat, and cause serious brain injury and death.

Vehicles with no back seat or a back seat that is not made for passengers are not the best choice for traveling with small children. However, the air bag can be turned off in some of these vehicles if the front seat is needed for a child passenger. See your vehicle owner's manual for more information.

Side air bags

Side air bags improve safety for adults in side-impact crashes. Read your vehicle owner's manual for more information about the air bags in your vehicle. Read your car safety seat manual and the vehicle owner's manual for guidance on placing the seat next to a side air bag.

If you need installation help

If you have questions or need help installing your car safety seat, find a certified CPS technician. Lists of certified CPS technicians and child seat fitting stations are available on the following Web sites:

[NHTSA](#) (or call NHTSA Vehicle Safety Hotline at **888/327-4236**)

[SeatCheck](#) (or call **866/SEATCHECK** [866/732-8243])

[National Child Passenger Safety Certified Technicians](#) (or call **877/366-8154**) This site provides information in Spanish and also provides a list of CPS technicians with enhanced training in protection of children with special needs.

Important reminders

1. Be a good role model. Make sure you always wear your seat belt. This will help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
2. Never leave your child alone in or around cars. Any of the following can happen when a child is left alone in or around a vehicle:
 - He can die of heat stroke because temperatures can reach deadly levels in minutes.
 - He can be strangled by power windows, retracting seat belts, sunroofs, or accessories.
 - He can knock the vehicle into gear, setting it in motion.
 - He can be backed over when the vehicle backs up.
 - He can become trapped in the trunk of the vehicle.
3. Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions. If you do not have the manufacturer's instructions for your car safety seat, write or call the company's customer service department. They will ask you for the model number, name of seat, and date of manufacture. The manufacturer's address and phone number are on the label on the seat. Also be sure to follow the instructions in your vehicle owner's manual about using car safety seats. Some manufacturers' instructions may be available on their Web sites.

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