

Grandparents' Guide to Car Seats

Buckling Up Your Precious Grandchildren



A car seat refresher

All grandparents want the best for their grandchildren. Many grandparents today spend lots of time caring for grandchildren. Learning to use today's car seats correctly is part of being a 21st century grandparent.

"But my kids survived just fine without car seats," say some. Back then, children survived by luck—and there were few safe car seats. Today, children survive crashes by riding in car seats designed for crash protection. There is more traffic now and children spend much more time in cars than ever before. The risks are very high.

Car crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injury to children. Using a car seat correctly is the best defense. Buckling up also helps children behave better in the car, so they do not distract you while you drive. Modern car seats have been proven to prevent or reduce serious injury in all but the most severe crashes. However, they are very different to use from models of 25 or 30 years ago.

CAR SAFETY BASICS

- Buckle up all children under age 13 in the back seat.
- Choose a car safety seat (car seat) that fits your grandchild, fits your vehicle, and is easy for you to use.
- Use the car seat instructions and car owner's manual for help installing and adjusting a car seat correctly.
- Make sure the car seat is installed tightly in the vehicle.
- Adjust the harness to be snug.
- Contact a Child Passenger Safety Technician if you have problems or questions (see Resources).

Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride



Choosing the right car seat

If you take care of your grandchildren regularly, consider buying your own car seats for your car. There is not just one "best" car seat. More expensive car seats are not always safer. All must pass the same strict crash tests. Choose a car seat that fits the child's age and weight, that can be installed tightly in your car(s), and that is easy for you to install and use correctly.

A new car seat is likely to be safer than a used one. They are easier to use and may have better safety features.

A used car seat may not be a real bargain and could be dangerous. It may have hidden safety problems. Make sure all recalls (if any) have been repaired and that the car seat has all its parts and instructions. Do not use a car seat that has been in a crash. Check for an expiration date. If there is none, avoid using a car seat over 6 years old.

Which type of car seat to use?

Choosing the right seat can be very confusing. **ALWAYS** check labels or instructions for weight and height limits. Types include:

1. **Rear-facing (A):** birth to 18 to 24 months; infant-only seats (up to 22 to 35 pounds) and convertibles (up to 30 to 45 pounds). Rear facing is the safest way to ride! Studies show that children who ride rear facing up to 24 months are **5 times safer** than children who are turned around earlier.
2. **Forward-facing with a harness** (convertible and forward-facing seats): from 18 to 24 months (**at the very least** 12 months AND 20 pounds) up to 40 to 80 pounds.
3. **Booster with vehicle lap-shoulder belt:** from **at least** 35 to 40 pounds, until child fits the seat belt, usually about age 8 to 10 and 80 to 100 pounds. Do not use a booster with a lap belt only. (For options with lap belts, see Resources).
4. **Adult lap-shoulder belt:** use when it fits correctly over the child's thighs and across the middle of the shoulder. Only use a lap-only belt as a last resort. Use the 5-Step Test for Seat Belt Use from SBS USA (see Resources).



A. Toddler riding rear facing in a convertible seat

Car seat features to try before you buy

- **Weight of the car seat itself:** Can you lift it easily? This is especially important if you will be taking it in and out of the car often.
- **Harness buckle:** Can you release the buckle easily? Buckles are required to be stiff enough so kids cannot unbuckle them. Some buttons are harder for adults to push than others, especially for people with arthritis.
- **Harness adjuster:** Can you adjust the straps easily? Look for a harness that adjusts in front.
- **Harness chest clip:** Can you open and close it easily?
- **Seat belt slots (path):** Can you fit your hands into the labeled openings in the car seat to pull the belt through?
- **Lower LATCH connectors:** Look for connectors that easily push on and release with a push button.

Where should your grandchildren ride?

The **back seat is safest**, even if the car does not have a passenger air bag in front. **NEVER** put a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag that is not turned off. That is very dangerous.

The center of the back seat is safest because it is farthest from any possible crash impact. However, the center can only be used if the fit is good there. It can be hard to install a car seat tightly in some center seats. A child using a booster seat can only sit in the center if a lap-shoulder belt is installed there.

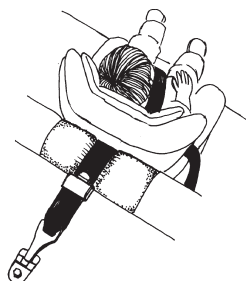
If you are not very strong and flexible, the center position may be a difficult place to install a car seat. It may also be hard for you to lift your grandchild into a car seat there. If this is a problem for you, install the car seat in the passenger side of the back seat. You won't have to climb into the car and you will be away from traffic when parked.

Installing a car seat tightly

A car seat can only do its job if it is connected tightly to the car. Do not guess about installing a car seat. Follow the car owner's manual and the car seat instructions.

There are two ways to install a car seat. Use the seat belt or the LATCH system. Use the one that works best for you to get the car seat in tightly. Always use the top tether strap (B) on a forward-facing car seat if your car has a tether anchor (see car manual). The tether provides extra protection in a crash.

If you need help, ask the child's parent or contact a local Child Passenger Safety Technician (see Resources).



B. Forward-facing car seat with tether strap

To tighten the seat belt or the LATCH system, push down on the car seat while you tighten the straps or belt. If the car seat faces forward, also attach the **tether strap** (B).

To test if the car seat is installed tightly, hold the car seat where the LATCH strap or seat belt goes through the car seat. Pull forward and side to side. If the car seat moves more than one inch, it is not tightly secured. (Do not grab near the top of the car seat to check for tightness. The movement there is okay.)

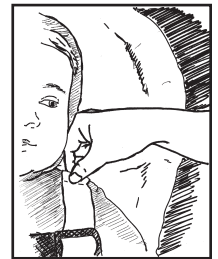
Installation can be easier with two people. If you are having trouble doing it yourself, ask a friend or the child's parent to help.

Using the harness properly

A harness that is not snug can lead to serious injury, so adjust it snugly. ALWAYS read the instructions!

1. Harness position is important and depends on which direction the seat is facing. See the car seat instructions for more information.

2. Make the harness snug so you cannot pinch any slack in the strap (C). An older child should not be able to lean forward.



C. Pinch test

Teaching grandchildren to ride safely

You can teach your grandchildren to enjoy riding buckled up. The car is not the place to "spoil" them by letting them ride unbuckled or in the front seat. Teach by example—always use your own seat belt and make sure everyone in the car buckles up. Make the ride a happy one. Bring along soft toys, small books to look at, or music you all can enjoy.

If your grandchild tries to wiggle out of the car seat, he or she may be bored or the harness may be too loose.

If the child continues to struggle, the best way to teach him or her to stay in the car seat is to stop the car immediately in a safe place. Be firm but gentle. Tell the child the car will not move until he or she stays buckled up and is quiet. Having another adult ride in back to play with the child can help during this difficult learning time.

You may have to stop the car a few times, but children as young as 2 years old soon get the message. You can also do this with older children if they get loud or rowdy.

Resources

Find a local Child Passenger Safety Technician: 866-732-8243 or www.seatcheck.org

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty), or www.safercar.gov

5-Step Test from SBS USA: 800-745-7233 or www.carseat.org

List of options for children over 40 pounds: www.saferidenews.com