

# Car Seat Safety Guidelines

The safest car seat for your child is the one that:

**1. Fits your child:**

Make sure your child's height and weight falls within the car seat's height and weight limit guidelines. It's on the labels.

**2. Fits your vehicle:**

Not every car seat can be correctly installed in every vehicle. Make sure the car seat fits correctly in the back seat of the vehicle before using it with your child. Ask the store if you can try it in your vehicle before purchasing it.

**3. Is easy for you to use correctly every time:**

Find a car seat that is easy for you to use properly every time. The easier it is, the more likely it will be used correctly every time.

## Follow the 4 Stages

Rear Facing

Forward Facing with Harness

Booster Seats

Seat Belts

**Stage 1: Rear-facing Car Seats** are used from birth until the child reaches the maximum height and weight limit the seat allows and until 2 years old. It has a harness and in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord. There are 2 types of rear facing seats:

1. **Infant-Only Seat:** This seat can only be used rear facing. The height and weight limits vary by manufacturer. Do not use the infant seat longer than the stated height and weight limits. If the child is not yet 2 years old, move the child to a convertible car seat in a rear facing position.



2. **Convertible Car Seat:** This seat can be used rear facing **or** forward facing. It is best practice to keep the child in the rear facing position until the child meets the maximum height and weight limit allowed by the car seat **and** until he/she is 2 years old.

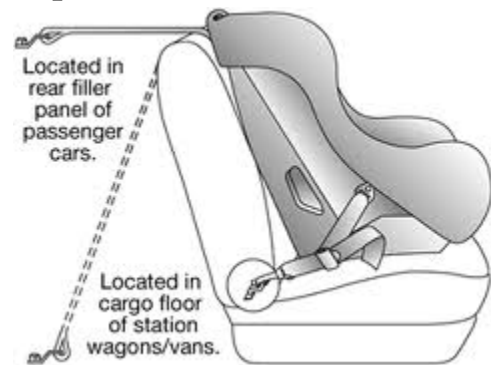


**Stage 2: Forward-facing Car Seats** have harnesses and are for children over 2 years old (for best safety) until 4 years old, and who have not reached the upper weight limit of the seat for forward facing.

1. **Convertible Car Seats:** Used forward-facing, these seats have permanent internal harnesses with an upper weight limit of 40 pounds. However, it is easy to find some that go up to 50, 60, or 80 pounds. For those children who reach 40 pounds but are not yet 4 years old, it is the best practice for your child's safety to remain in harness straps with the higher weight limit until he/she reaches 4 years old. The forward facing rider should also have the car seat secured with a top-tether strap to limit the child's forward movement during a crash.



#### Top Tether



2. **Combination Seats** are forward facing only seats with internal harnesses that can be removed when the child reaches the weight limit stated by the manufacturer (**and**, for best safety, 4 years old). While using the harness, the top tether should also be used. After meeting the upper weight limit of the harness, **the harness straps can then be removed and the Combination seat can now be used as a booster seat with a lap and shoulder seat belt.** Read the car seat manufacturer instruction to see if a tether strap should remain in use with the booster seat.



**Stage 3: Booster Seats** are used with lap-shoulder belts only! Although some labels say they are able to be used after the child is over one year and 20 pounds, this would be an unsafe practice. For best safety, a booster seat should be used after 4 years old and over 40 pounds. It is the law for children to use a booster seat until 8 years old or 4'9" tall, whichever comes first. However, the best test for determining when it's okay to move out of the booster seat is the **5-Step test (see below)**



### **Booster Seat 5-Step Test**

1. Have the child sit all the way back on the vehicle seat without slouching.
2. Note if the child's knees bend comfortably over the edge of the auto seat.
3. Check the position of the shoulder portion of the seat belt; it should cross the center of the shoulder between the neck and arm.
4. Note the position of the lap portion of the seat belt; It should be low on the body, touching the tops of the thighs. If it rides up to the center of the abdomen this poses a danger to the internal organs in this area of the body.
5. Ask yourself if the child can stay seated like this for the whole trip? Or will this be uncomfortable leading the child to slouch in order for their knees to bend comfortably over the edge of the seat, then wishing to place the shoulder belt behind their back because it's too close to their neck?

**If you answered "NO" to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to ride safely in a vehicle.**

**Stage 4: Seat Belts** are to be used to restrain passengers once they pass the 5-Step Test and can correctly fit into an adult lap and shoulder belt. The seat belt should lie across the upper thighs and be snug over the center of the shoulder and over the center of the chest, touching the large bones of the body. It is a secondary law in the state of Ohio for seat belts to be used from 8 years to 15 years old whether riding in the back seat or the front seat. It is best practice to keep your children in the back seat until 13 years old.

### **Booster Seat 5-Step Test**

6. Have the child sit all the way back on the vehicle seat without slouching.
7. Note if the child's knees bend comfortably over the edge of the auto seat.
8. Check the position of the shoulder portion of the seat belt; it should cross the center of the shoulder between the neck and arm.

9. Note the position of the lap portion of the seat belt; It should be low on the body, touching the tops of the thighs. If it rides up to the center of the abdomen this poses a danger to the internal organs in this area of the body.
10. Ask yourself if the child can stay seated like this for the whole trip? Or will this be uncomfortable leading the child to slouch in order for their knees to bend comfortably over the edge of the seat, then wishing to place the shoulder belt behind their back because it's too close to their neck?

**If you answered “NO” to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to ride safely in a vehicle.**