

# Car Seat Basics

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for young children, and properly restrained children have a more than 50 percent greater chance of surviving a crash. When driving with children, always use the appropriate car seat or seat belt.

## The 4 Steps for Keeping a Child Riding Safely

### STEP 1 REAR- FACING



All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car safety seat as long as possible, until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the seat's manufacturer.

### STEP 2 FORWARD- FACING



All children who have outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit for their car safety seat should use a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by the seat's manufacturer.

### STEP 3 BOOSTER SEATS



All children whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their car safety seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt fits properly, typically when the child reaches 4'9" tall at 8–12 years old.

### STEP 4 SEAT BELTS



When children are old enough and large enough to use the vehicle's seat belt alone, always use lap and shoulder belts for optimal protection.

**ALL CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 13 YEARS OLD SHOULD BE RESTRAINED IN THE REAR SEAT OF VEHICLES.**

*Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, Policy Statement, 2018*

To learn more or locate a certified child safety technician, visit [NHTSA.gov](http://NHTSA.gov).

# Common car seat mistakes and how to avoid them

**More than 70 percent of car seats are not installed properly.  
Most common errors are easy to fix with just a few adjustments.**

## **THE HARNESS STRAPS ARE NOT TIGHT ENOUGH.**

- Harness straps should fit snug to the child's body and should pass the "pinch test," meaning you should not be able to pinch any excess strap material.

## **THE CAR SEAT ISN'T INSTALLED TIGHT ENOUGH.**

- Car seats, whether installed with the seat belt or LATCH system, should not move more than one inch from side to side when tested at the point where the car seat attaches to the vehicle.

## **MOVING CHILDREN TO THE NEXT STEP TOO SOON.**

- Children should stay in their car seats until they outgrow the height or weight limit of the seat before moving to the next step, such as rear-facing to forward-facing.

## **THE CHEST CLIP IS TOO LOW.**

- The chest clip should be secured at the child's armpits to ensure harness straps remain in the correct position.

## **PUTTING KIDS IN THE FRONT SEAT TOO EARLY.**

- Children should ride in the back seat of the vehicle until they reach 13 years old. The force of an air bag may be dangerous for children under the age of 13. Buckling up in the back seat decreases the risk of death by one-third.



## **TIPS FOR BUYING CAR SEATS**

You should never purchase or borrow a used car seat that:

- Has been involved in a crash
- Has been recalled
- Has no date of manufacture and/or model number
- Has expired (typically after six years)
- Is damaged or missing parts

**Car seats should not be purchased at garage sales or second-hand stores since the history of the seat is unknown.**

## **MICHIGAN SEAT BELTS AND CHILD RESTRAINTS**

- Children younger than age 4 must ride in a car seat in the rear seat, if the vehicle has a rear seat. If all available rear seats are occupied by children under 4, then a child under 4 may ride in a car seat in the front seat. A child in a rear-facing car seat may only ride in the front seat if the airbag is turned off.
- All children must be buckled in a car seat or booster seat until they are 8 years old or 4'9".
- It is recommended that children 8 and older be placed in an age- and weight-appropriate child safety seat if the vehicle's seat belt does not fit properly. All children ages 12 and under ride in a rear seat.
- Drivers, front-seat passengers regardless of age, and all passengers ages 8 through 15 are required to wear properly adjusted seat belts.

Children should never ride on a lap, in a portable crib, or in any other device not approved for use in the vehicle.



P.O. Box 30634 • Lansing, MI 48909  
517-284-3332  
[Michigan.gov/carseats](http://Michigan.gov/carseats)