

Boosters for Big Kids

Protecting preschoolers and children up to age 8

Car Safety Basics

- Your child should **use a car seat (child safety seat) with a harness for as long as possible, until at least age 4.** After age 4, most children are ready to use a booster seat.
- **ALWAYS** follow booster seat and car instructions.
- A lap-shoulder belt **MUST** be used with a booster. **NEVER** use only a lap belt with a booster.
- **If your car has no shoulder belts in the back seat,** see the other side of this sheet.
- Teach your child to buckle up and to pull up on the shoulder belt to make the lap part tight.
- Use the back seat for all children under age 13. The back seat is safer, with or without an air bag.
- The center of the back seat is safest. It is farthest away from any impact in a crash. However, a child in a booster **MUST** sit where there is a shoulder belt.
- **ALWAYS** use your seat belt. Your child learns from what you do. Make sure everyone (grandparents, friends, and older children) in the car buckles up.
- Make sure others who drive your child know you expect your child to use a car seat or booster on every trip.

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Boosters are much safer than seat belts alone

When does a child outgrow a car seat?

Your child should use a car seat with a harness for as long as possible. It will give more protection than a booster or a seat belt. Most car seats fit children up to 40 pounds. Some larger car seats fit children up to 65 to 80 pounds.

Keep your child in a car seat until:

- his ears are above the top of the child seat, or
- her shoulders are above the top shoulder strap position, or
- his weight is at the upper limit of the car seat (check the label or instructions).

When your child outgrows a car seat, he or she usually needs a booster seat.

What is a booster? What does it do?

A booster seat raises the child up. It helps the lap and shoulder belts fit properly (picture, top). Using a booster has been proven to reduce injuries. (More on page 2.) The shoulder belt should cross the middle of the shoulder. The lap belt should be down on the top of the thighs.

A booster is not the best choice, if:

- The child is over 40 pounds but too short for a booster.
 - The child is too wiggly to sit still in a booster.
 - There is no shoulder belt to use with the booster.
- These children would be much safer riding in a larger car seat or a harness. (See Resources.)

Why can't my child use only a seat belt?

Seat belts are made to fit adults. They do not fit most children under at least age 8 to 10. If the lap belt is around or near the child's waist (picture, bottom), it could cause serious injuries in a crash. If the shoulder belt is across the neck, a child may put it behind his back or under his arm. That also could cause very serious injuries.

When will my child be big enough to use a seat belt?

Use the 5-Step Seat Belt Test* to find out. Sit your child in the back seat and put on the seat belt. Check these things. If you answer "yes" to **ALL** of these steps, your child is big enough to use a seat belt without a booster.

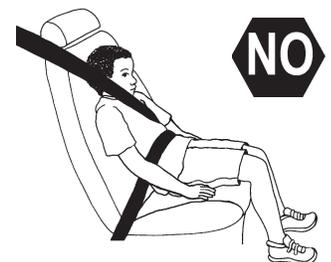
- Can your child sit with a straight back against the vehicle seat back?
- Do his legs bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
 - Does the lap belt stay down on her hips, touching the thighs?
- Is the shoulder belt on the center of the shoulder?
- Can your child sit this way without slouching during a long ride?

Note: Seat belts in other vehicles may not fit the same way.

* Adapted from SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. 5-Step Test



A booster helps seat belt fit right. This is a backless booster.



Poor seat belt fit. Child is too small to use it safely.

Kinds of Booster Seats

Most fit children from 40 to 80–100 pounds.

- **Booster with a high back:** Best if your vehicle has a low seatback to help prevent neck injuries. A high back may provide better head protection in side impacts. The high back helps keep a sleeping child in place (picture, right). (Note: A few cannot be used with low-back vehicle seats.)
- **Combination seat:** This kind of car seat has a harness for a child under 40 pounds. The harness can be taken out to make it into a high-back booster for a larger child.
- **Booster with no back:** A backless booster (shown on page 1) is fine if the vehicle seat has a high back and your child does not sleep in the car. Older children may think they look more “grown up.”



High-back
belt-positioning booster

Using a booster correctly

A lap-shoulder belt **MUST** be used to hold your child in a booster. **NEVER** use a lap belt only. A few also use the LATCH anchors. **ALWAYS** follow the instructions.

Check the shoulder belt position. It should go across the middle of the shoulder. Most boosters have shoulder belt guides that can be adjusted to hold the belt in the right place. Make sure the belt slides through the guide easily.

Tip: Let your child try a booster. Most kids find a booster is more comfortable than just a seat belt. It will help him or her see out the window better, too.

Air Bags - The Back Seat is Safest

- Most cars today have passenger air bags. Look for the warning label on the sun visor.
- **NEVER** put a baby in a rear-facing car seat in the front seat.
- If you cannot avoid putting a forward-facing child in front, make sure the car seat harness or the shoulder belt is snug. Move the vehicle seat all the way back.
- In a sports car or pickup truck, look for an air bag on/off switch. Turn the switch off when a child is in front.
- Newer cars have sensors that turn off air bags **Read the car owners' manual** for more information.

Side air bags in the back seat (See the car manual): Side air bags help protect a child who is buckled up. Make sure your child does not lean against the side of the car.

If a Car has Only Lap Belts in Back

A booster seat cannot be used with a lap belt, so a different safety device is needed. Also, some children over 40 pounds need more support than a booster gives.

Options are:

- A car seat with a harness for a child over 40 pounds (picture, right).
- Vests and harnesses for children over 40 pounds. Most require a tether strap. One can be used with a booster seat. (See www.safetyangel.com.)

Go to www.saferidenews.com for a list of these products.



Car seat for child over 40 pounds, used with seat belt and tether

Using seat belts correctly

When your child is big enough, teach him how to wear the seat belt correctly. (Adults need to buckle up right, too.)

Lap belt fit is most important. The belt must be low and tight, touching the top of the thighs. Teach your child to push the lap belt down and make it snug (picture, below).

It is hard to keep the lap belt snug and low if a child is wearing a heavy jacket. Either pull the jacket up so the lap belt goes under it or open the jacket and pull it to the sides.

If there is a shoulder belt, make sure your child uses it. The shoulder belt should cross the middle of the shoulder.

Make sure your child does **not** put the shoulder belt behind her back or under her arm. That can cause very serious injury.



Correct seat belt fit

Some cars have built-in shoulder belt height adjusters (see the owner's manual). These make the shoulder belt fit better. **Avoid** using a shoulder belt adjuster bought from a store. They do not have to meet safety standards. They may make the seat belt too loose or the lap belt too high. This can cause serious injury.

Resources

- NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty), www.nhtsa.gov
- SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org
- To find a local car seat inspection station: 866-732-8243, www.seatcheck.org
- Car seats for children over 40 pounds: www.saferidenews.com
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: www.chop.edu/carseat