

# Meeting the Car Seat Challenge

## Keeping Toddlers and Preschoolers Safe and Happy

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013

### Car Seat Safety Basics

- Use the center of the back seat if possible. This is the safest position.
- **Keep your toddler rear facing** as long as possible. A rear-facing car seat protects children better to at least age 2. Convertible car seats can face the rear up to 30 to 45 pounds. **See page 2.**
- **ALWAYS follow the car seat instructions** and the car owner's manual. For more help, find a local Child Passenger Safety Inspection Location (see Resources).
- **Place harness straps in the correct position.** The straps must go through the car seat **at or above** the child's shoulders when forward facing. When rear facing, the straps must go through the car seat **at or below** the child's shoulders.
- **Adjust the harness to be snug.** Your child should not be able to lean forward.
- **Keep your child in a car seat with a harness as long as possible.** The straps hold a child in place if she is wiggly or falls asleep in the car.
- **ALWAYS use your seat belt.** Kids learn from your example. Make sure everyone in the car (grandparents, friends, and older children) buckles up also.

### Danger: Air Bags in the Front Seat

Children are safer in the back seat. **NEVER** put a rear-facing child in front unless the air bag has been turned off. If a forward-facing child **MUST** ride in front, slide the vehicle seat all the way back and make sure the harness is snug. Turn off the air bag, if you can.

Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride



### Keeping Control with a Toddler in the Car

A toddler can test your patience as a parent. Children from ages 1 to 4 are learning new skills and feeling more independent. It is normal for young children to test you by trying to do what they want. They can learn how to undo buckles, wiggle out of straps, and try to escape. Your child's harness must stay on your child when driving, but also be easy to remove in an emergency. **There is no "escape-proof" car seat.**

### Surviving Car Seat Struggles

- Insist that your child **must** ride in his car seat on every trip. Make no exceptions. If you let him ride unbuckled once, he will try to get out often.
- Make sure others who drive your child also buckle him up on every trip.
- Keep the harness snug and the chest clip at armpit level. If he can lean forward in the car seat or get his shoulders out, the straps are too loose.
- Many toddlers learn how to move or open the chest clip on the harness. Look for a car seat that has a clip style that is more difficult for your child to alter. Check with the maker of your car seat for advice.
- Use the "Stop the Car" method. Whenever a child does not follow your rules, stop the car in a safe place. Be very firm and stay calm. Tell him the car will not go until he is back in his seat. If you **always** do this, he will learn quickly.
- Use positive rewards. Give your child praise and hugs when he rides quietly and stays in his seat.
- Give your child things to do. If she fights being put into her car seat, distract her with a toy or talk/sing to her. Keep soft toys and books for use only in the car. (Be sure that children never use seat belts as playthings.)
- On long trips, stop often to stretch.
- If your child keeps escaping, you can try a vest that closes in the back (see E-Z-ON Products under Resources).



Keeping toddlers buckled up can be a tough challenge for parents.



Let him know when you like what he does. "Good job!"



A book or special toy will keep many children happy in the car.

## Toddler and Preschooler Challenge

### Car Seats for 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds

Keep your toddler rear facing as long as possible. Research shows that children up to age 2 are five times safer in a rear-facing car seat. Most convertible seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 45 pounds.

When a child must face forward, he can ride in one of two types of car seats with a harness. Continue to use one of these seats with a harness as long as the child fits. (Check label and manual.) A car seat with a higher harness weight and height limit is the best choice because it can be used until the child is much older and is ready to sit still in a booster.

- 1) **Convertible car seat:** Faces the rear or the front of the car. Some can be used forward facing up to only 40 pounds. Many can be used up to 65 pounds or more.
- 2) **Forward-facing-only car seat:** Always faces the front of the car and can be used up to 40 to 90 pounds with a harness, depending on the model. Most can become a booster by removing the harness. Use the harness as long as it fits the child by height and weight.

### The “best” car seat for your toddler or preschooler

- Fits your child’s weight and height, with room to grow.
- Can be installed tightly in your car—try before buying.
- Has a harness that is easy to buckle and adjust to fit snugly.

### Seat belts are not enough for young children!

Most kids do not fit well in lap-shoulder belts until at least 8 to 12 years old. When a child outgrows his harness, there are two options:

- 1) **Car seat with higher size maximums:** If your car has no shoulder belts in the back seat or if your child still needs a harness, choose a car seat, safety vest, or harness product with a higher harness height and/or weight limit. (See Resources.)
- 2) **Booster seat:** If your car has lap-shoulder belts in the back seat, consider a booster when the harness is outgrown. If the child can’t sit still in a booster for the entire ride OR is not large enough to meet the booster size limits, find a car seat with a harness that fits instead.

### Check a Second-Hand Car Seat Carefully

A used car seat may have hidden safety problems. Make sure any recalls have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions. If the car seat has been in a crash, it should **not** be used again. Don’t use a car seat that is expired—usually when more than 6 years old. Most are marked with an expiration date. Newer car seats are easier to use and often have better safety features.

### Resources

**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** (recall list, general advice):

888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:** 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)

**Find a Child Passenger Safety Inspection Location:**

866-732-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

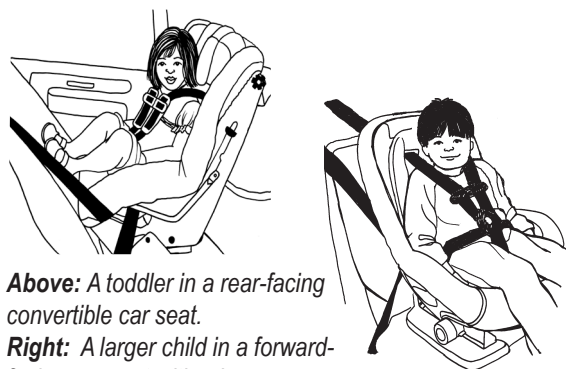
**General parenting tips:** [www.positiveparenting.com](http://www.positiveparenting.com)

**E-Z-ON Products** (harnesses/vests): 800-323-6598, [www.ezonpro.com](http://www.ezonpro.com)

**American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):** [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

(See AAP’s product listing to find car seats with high weight limits.)

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**Above:** A toddler in a rear-facing convertible car seat.

**Right:** A larger child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

### Install the Car Seat Correctly

**ALWAYS** follow the instructions for the car seat and for the car.

The center of the back seat is the safest position for a car seat.

Fasten the car seat tightly to the car with the seat belt or LATCH. Use whichever gives the tightest fit. In most vehicles, a seat belt must be used in the center (check the car manual). Do NOT use both, unless the instructions say it is okay. Press down on the car seat when tightening the belt or strap(s). Grab the car seat at the belt path. It should not move more than one inch forward or side to side when pulled.

### Use a Tether When Forward Facing

It is very important to attach and tighten the tether strap when forward facing (picture, right). A tether makes the car seat **much** safer. Check the car manual and car seat instructions for more information.



### WARNING!:

#### Keep Unused Seat Belts Away From Kids

A child can be seriously injured if a shoulder belt is wrapped around his neck. Teach children not to play with seat belts. If a child can reach an unused seat belt that would lock if pulled all the way out, buckle and lock the belt yourself. This will keep the belt from lengthening if grabbed. You can do this for the unused seat belt before installing a car seat with LATCH, and for any other unused seat belts near the child.