

# Boosters for Big Kids

## Protecting School-Age Children

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013

### Car Safety Basics

- Your child should use a car safety seat (car seat) with a harness for as long as possible, until at least age 4. After it's outgrown, your child should ride in 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 lap-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 snug.
- **Use the back seat for all children under age 13.** The back seat is safer, even if there is no air bag in front.
- The center of the back seat is safest. It is farthest away from 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** in the car buckles up.
- Make sure others who drive your child know you expect your child to use a car seat or booster.

**Warning!** Always secure a booster with a seat belt or LATCH when it is not being used. A loose booster can be thrown around in a sudden stop or crash and might injure people in the car.

Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride



### Car Seat or Booster—Safer Than Seat Belt Alone

#### How long should a child ride in a car seat?

Your child should use a car seat with a harness as long as possible. It will usually give more protection than a booster or a seat belt. Most car seats fit children up to at least 40 pounds, and many can be used up to 65 pounds or more.

#### Keep your child in a car seat until:

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

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

#### What is a booster? What does it do?

A booster seat raises the child up to help the lap and shoulder belts fit right (picture, top right). Using a booster seat in the rear seat reduces a child's risk of injury by almost 60 percent. A booster also makes the child more comfortable and allows him to see out the window better.

#### A booster is **NOT** the best choice if:

- The child weighs too little or is 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 should ride in a car seat. One that holds larger-size children might be needed. (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 until at least age 8 to 12. If the lap belt is around or near the child's waist (picture, bottom right), it could cause serious injuries in a crash. If the shoulder belt is across the neck, a child might 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 the steps below. If you answer "yes" to **ALL** of these questions, 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?
- In that position, do the legs bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
- Does the lap belt stay low, touching the thighs (not on the belly)?
- Does the shoulder belt cross the center of the child's shoulder?
- Can your child sit this way without slouching during a long ride?

Note: All cars are not the same, so do this test for any car your child rides in.

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



A booster helps the seat belt fit properly. This is a backless booster.



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

## Kinds of Booster Seats

Most boosters fit children from 40 up to 80 to 120 pounds.

- **Booster with a high back:** This type helps prevent neck injuries if your car has low seatbacks. A high back also may provide better head protection in side crashes. The high back helps keep a sleeping child in place (picture, right). (Read instructions. A few cannot be used with low-back vehicle seats.)



Booster with a high back

- **Combination seat:** This kind of car seat has a harness for a child under a stated weight limit. The harness must 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.”

## Choosing and Using a Booster Correctly

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

**Proper fit of the seat belt is important.** Choose a booster that makes your car’s seat belt fit your child correctly. Take your child with you when shopping for a booster.

### To check for proper fit:

- Place your child on the booster and buckle the seat belt around your child. Use the seat belt guides on the booster.
- Check the lap belt position. It should be on top of the thighs or very low on the hips.
- Check the shoulder belt position. It should go across the middle of the shoulder. Most boosters have shoulder belt guides. Adjust these to help with proper fit. Make sure the belt slides through the guide easily.

## Air Bag Warning

In a crash, the impact of the air bag can injure or kill a child. Never put a rear-facing car seat in front of an active air bag.

It is always safer in the rear. If you cannot avoid putting a forward-facing child in front, make sure the car seat harness (or the seat belt) is snug. Move the vehicle seat all the way back.

A sports car or pickup truck with no back seat or a very small back seat may have a switch or sensor that turns the front air bag off. Make sure the air bag is turned off before putting a child in front. (Turn it on again for adult passengers.)

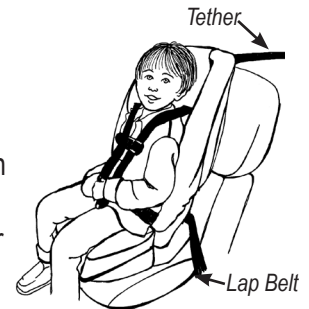
If there are side air bags in the back seat, make sure your child does not lean against the side of the car.

**Check the car manual for more information about air bags.**

## If a Car Has Only Lap Belts in Back

A booster seat **cannot** be used with only a lap belt, so instead use:

- A car seat with a harness that holds larger children (picture, right). It is okay to install a car seat with a lap belt, and it is much safer to also attach the tether. Some *require* tether use at higher child weights.
- A vest or safety harness. These require a tether strap to be used. (See E-Z-ON Products in Resources.)



A car seat for larger children, used with a lap 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 correctly, 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. Pull the jacket up so the lap belt goes under it or open the jacket and pull it to the sides.

**A lap-shoulder belt gives much better protection** than only a lap belt. It 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.

Some cars have built-in shoulder belt height adjusters (see the owner’s manual). These make the shoulder belt fit better. **Avoid** using shoulder belt adjusters that did not come with the car. They do not have crash safety standards. They often make the seat belt too loose or the lap belt too high. This can cause serious injury.



Correct seat belt fit

**Be sure children do not use seat belts as playthings.** A seat belt wrapped around the neck is very dangerous.

## Resources

### National Auto Safety Hotline:

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

**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.)

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

**Car Seat Inspection Locator:** 866-732-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

**The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia:** [www.chop.edu/carseat](http://www.chop.edu/carseat)

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