

Buckling Up, Keeping Youth Safe

Preteens from 8 to 12: Making Safer Choices

Child
Safety
Facts
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Will your preteen be protected in a car crash?

Children between the ages of 8 and 12 are eager to be accepted by their friends. They try to behave older than they are and be independent. Following safety rules can be hard for them, especially when they are riding with others—caregivers, car pools, older brothers and sisters, or older friends.

Did you know?

- Kids in this age range are much less likely to buckle up than younger kids.
- Many in this age range are still too small to fit in seat belts safely and should use a car booster seat.
- They are more likely to be riding in the front seat, where the risk of injury is greater.
- They are at greatest risk when they ride with new drivers; 16- and 17-year-olds are most likely to crash.
- Many state laws do not spell out the best safety advice for older children. Some ignore the benefit of seat belts and boosters for older children or people riding in the back seat.

Is your child big enough to use only a seat belt?

Correct seat belt fit depends on your child's size, the shape of the vehicle seat, and the design of the seat belt. Most children do not fit in a seat belt until they are about 4 foot 9 inches tall. Your child is big enough for a lap-shoulder belt if you can answer "yes" to these questions.

Can your child:

- ✓ Sit up straight against the vehicle seatback?
- ✓ Bend legs naturally at the edge of the vehicle seat?
- ✓ Sit comfortably without slouching for the entire ride?
- ✓ Keep lap belt down low, touching the thighs?
- ✓ Sit with shoulder belt across the center of the shoulder?

If you answer "no" to any of the questions, your child needs a booster seat to ride safely in the car. You might find that the seat belts fit your child in one car but not in another.

If your car has only lap belts in back, use the first four points above to check correct fit. (A booster cannot be used with only a lap belt.)

Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride



Above: This 11-year-old is wearing her seat belt correctly.



Right: These boys are wearing their seat belts incorrectly. This could cause injury.



Correct seat belt use is important!

Incorrect use can cause serious injuries or death.

- Your child should sit up straight with his back flat against the vehicle seatback. Never ride with the vehicle seat tilted back.
- The lap belt should be snug and low over the upper thighs. Teach your child to pull up on the shoulder belt to tighten the lap belt.
- The shoulder belt should be snug across the chest and lay flat on the shoulder. Never put the shoulder belt behind the back or under the arm. (See pictures above.)
- Some cars have built-in shoulder belt height adjusters. These can be used to make the shoulder belt fit better. Check the car owner's manual.
- Do not use "add-on" products to adjust the shoulder belt. These have no crash standards. They could put slack in the shoulder belt or pull the lap belt up too high. This could cause serious injury in a crash. If the seat belt doesn't fit your child well, use a booster seat instead.
- **If your vehicle does not have lap-shoulder belts** in the back seat, a lap belt is better than nothing. There are some safer options—contact a safety organization for help (see Resources).

All children under at least age 13 should buckle up in the back seat, not the front. If there are side air bags in the back, be sure your child does not lean against the window or door.

Teach Your Preteen How to Make Good Safety Choices



Guiding Your Children

Give preteens messages that are consistent and easy to understand. This will help them make safe choices.

In Your Car

- You are a role model. Your children learn by watching you. Always wear your seat belt. Be sure everyone in the car buckles up. **No exceptions!**
- Tell your children why you want them to buckle up. Say, for example, “because we care about you” and “we would feel very badly if you got hurt.”
- Keep children in the back seat as long as possible. Research shows that children under 13 years old are more than 30 percent safer in the back seat.
- Make the back seat more fun to encourage your children to like riding there. Keep books, electronic games, and other activities in the back.

Riding With Others

- When making carpool plans, make sure there are not too many people in the car. Insist on one seat belt per person at all times. You may need to use two cars or make two trips.
- Avoid having your child ride with a driver who has not been fully licensed for at least a year or even two years. This is a law in some states. New teen drivers are three times more likely to have a crash than older adult drivers. Passengers could distract the new driver and possibly cause a crash.
- Involve your children in family discussions about setting “house and car rules.” Discuss who the children are allowed to ride with in a car, when a child should refuse a ride, and that buckling up is **always** required.

- Decide what you will do if your child breaks family rules. When you make a rule, explain the reasons behind it. Make the penalty for breaking the rule clear in advance.
- Tell your children that riding in the cargo areas of vans, station wagons, and pickup trucks, or in trunks or on top of cars, is very dangerous and that they are **NEVER** allowed to ride there.

Resisting Peer Pressure

- Teach your children to resist peer pressure and to speak up for their own safety. Give examples such as, “I’m not going to ride without a seat belt, it’s not safe.”
- Encourage them to ask everyone in the car to buckle up. They could say, “Everyone please buckle up; sometimes unbuckled people can hurt other people in the car.”
- Practice with your children. Ask them, “What would you do if there are too many kids or they are not buckling up?”
- Remind them to always buckle up, even if others don’t.
- Tell your children to say “no” to riding with anyone who has been drinking alcohol, even an adult.
- Let your children know what to do if they don’t feel comfortable riding with someone. Tell them you will pick them up if they want a ride.
- Be sure they know how to reach you or another trusted adult if they need help or a safe ride home. Make sure your child has a cell phone, calling card, or money to use in case he or she needs to make a phone call.
- Refuse to give in to pressure from other parents. Be willing to drive your children and their friends so they all can ride safely.

Resources

Preteens, boosters, and seat belts:

Safe Kids’s Safest Generation: www.safestgeneration.org

Make It Click for Tweens: www.umakeitclick.org

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 tty, www.safercar.gov

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, 800-747-7266 (Spanish), www.carseat.org

Safe Ride News Publications: 800-403-1424, www.saferidenews.com

Parenting preteens:

ParentFurther: www.parentfurther.com

Parenting Adolescents: www.parentyouradolescent.com

Search Institute: www.search-institute.org