

# ✓ Check Your Child's Car Seat!

## Choosing and Using Car Seats Correctly

### ❑ Is your child using the right car seat?

**STAGE 1: Riding rear facing**—the safest way for a baby or toddler to ride.

**Child's first year:** Rear-facing-only car seats (A) are smaller and easy to carry. Make sure the baby's head is at least an inch below the top of the car seat.



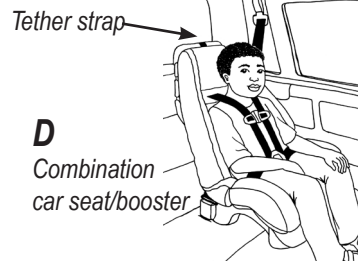
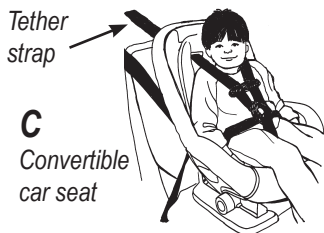
Convertible car seats face the rear for babies up to 30 to 50 pounds (B) (check label), then can be changed to face forward. (C, below).



**Child's second year:** Continue facing the rear until the child is at the car seat's rear-facing weight limit or the child's head is an inch below the top of the car seat. Many children ride in a convertible car seat to face the rear after about age one.

### STAGE 2: Riding forward facing with a harness (C, D)—

Use when a car seat that faces the rear is outgrown. May be a convertible car seat, combination car seat (forward-facing seat/booster), built-in car seat, or vest.



### STAGE 3: Riding in a booster seat with a lap-shoulder belt (E)—

for school-aged children who have outgrown a harness. Children need a booster until the seat belts fit correctly, usually between ages 10 to 12. **Always** use a lap-shoulder belt with a booster, **never** a lap-only belt.

If the car has only lap-only belts, use a vest or car seat with with a weight limit that fits larger children.



### Resources

National Vehicle Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, [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 Checkup Location:

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

### ❑ Is the car seat second-hand?

- **Avoid second-hand car seats.** If one is used, check it carefully. Make sure it is not recalled and has all parts and instructions. Make sure it has not been in a crash. Don't use a car seat after its "do not use" date—many may not be used longer than 6 years. If you are not sure it's safe, don't use it!

### ❑ Does your child ride in back?

- **The back seat** is much safer than the front. Children under 13 might be big and tall, but their bodies are still different from an adults. They should ride in the back.
- **Air bag safety: Never** put a child in a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag. The force of the air bag can kill any child sitting too close to it. If a truck or car has an air bag on-off switch, **turn it off** if a child must ride in the front seat.

### ❑ Are you following the instructions?

- Always follow instructions for your child's car seat.
- Also read the sections on seat belts, LATCH, air bags, and car seats in any car you will use.

### ❑ Is the car seat tightly installed?

- Car seats can be installed with either a seat belt or LATCH. Use whichever gives the tightest fit. Do **not** use both, unless the car seat **and** car instructions say it is okay. Check car seat labels for weight limits for using LATCH.
- Put the seat belt or LATCH strap through the correct path on the car seat (check labels).
- If using LATCH, connect the car seat hooks to the correct anchor bars in the car. Check the car manual.
- Always attach the tether strap on forward-facing car seats.
- Tighten the seat belt or LATCH. A car seat should move less than 1 inch if pushed while holding it near the belt/LATCH.

### ❑ Are the harness straps the right height? Are they snug on your child?

- When rear facing, shoulder straps should be as close as possible to the child's shoulders **or below**.
- When forward facing, straps must be **at or above** the shoulders. (Check instructions; some say to use top slots.)
- Make harness straps snug, so you cannot pinch any slack.
- Make sure straps are flat, not twisted.
- Put the chest clip at armpit level.

**Montgomery County CPS Program**  
Fire and Rescue Service  
For more information call:  
Hotline Number 240-777-2222