

# Selecting the Right Car Seat

## Keep Your Child Safe in Stages

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2018

The SAFEST car seat for your child is the one that . . .

### Fits your child

Children are safest when they stay in each of the stages shown below for as long as possible, riding in a car seat that fits them. Make sure your child meets the car seat weight and height guidelines. Check labels and instructions.

### Fits your car

Make sure the car seat fits correctly in your car. Not every car seat can be installed correctly in every car. If you need help, talk to someone trained to help with car seats. (See “Find someone to help” on page 2.)

### Is easy for YOU to use

Find a car seat that is easy for you to use the right way every time. The easier it is for you to use, the more likely you will use it correctly—so your child will ride safely every time you travel.

## Stage 1: Ride Rear Facing



...from birth until baby meets the rear-facing size limit.

Look for these types:

**Rear-facing-only car seat (shown):** Use rear facing up to 22 to 40 pounds. A handle makes it easy to carry.

**Convertible car seat:** This type is larger and stays in the car. Use rear facing up to 30 to 50 pounds. Use forward facing when your child is too heavy or tall to face the rear.

## Stage 2: Ride Forward Facing in a Harness



...when the child no longer fits in a rear-facing car seat until the harness no longer fits by height or weight.

Look for these types:

**Convertible, forward-facing-only, or vest:** These fit children up to at least 40 pounds, but most can be used by much heavier children, up to 65 to 80 pounds.

**Combination seat:** For use with the harness up to 40 to 90 pounds. Take the harness off to use it as a booster seat when the child is older and larger.

## Stage 3: Ride in a Booster Seat



...when the child has outgrown a harness but does not yet fit a seat belt (see below); likely until about 10 to 12 years old.

Look for one that goes to at least 100 pounds. One without a back is okay if the car has head restraints and the child does not nap while riding. One with a high back (shown) might protect better in side crashes.

**A booster must be used with a lap-shoulder belt.** If the car has only lap belts, don't use a booster. Instead, find a car seat with a harness that fits the child (see Resources). A car seat is also better for a child who can't sit still in a booster.

## Stage 4: Ride in a Lap-Shoulder Belt

...when the belt fits well, usually when 10 to 12 years old.

To check fit, use the 5-Step Belt Fit Test (see Resources).

## Crash Testing and Ratings

Every kind of child car safety seat (car seat) sold in the United States or Canada is required by law to pass tough crash tests. These tests show what would happen if a car was driven into a brick wall at high speed. This is a much more serious kind of crash than most people will ever be in. Car seats that pass these tests are safe to use.

Most car seat makers do more testing than required. They do these tougher crash tests to make sure their car seats are safe.

There are also several rating programs for car seats, such as *Consumer Reports*, *BabyGearLab*, IIHS booster fit ratings, and the NHTSA Ease-of-Use Ratings. Most reviews are based on how easy the testers think the car seats are to use, but some also do crash testing.

Rating programs can be helpful. Be aware, though, that a “best pick” may not be the best car seat to fit *your* child and *your* car. No car seat can be best for every family situation. Pick the car seat that works well for your child.

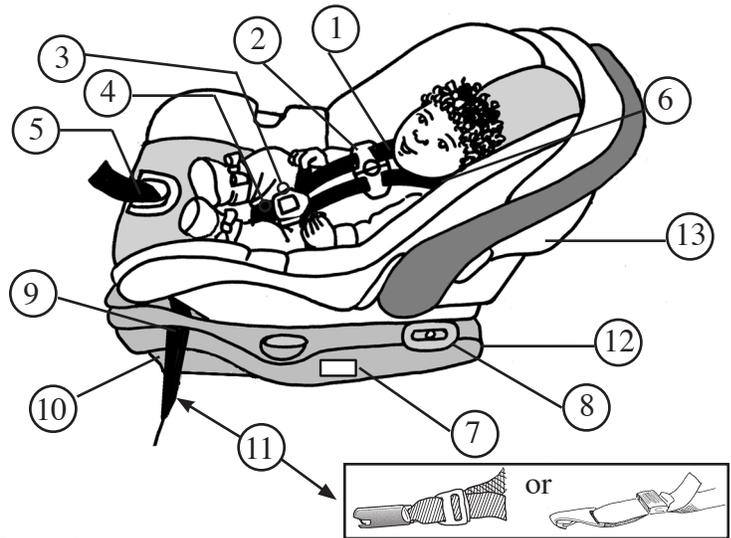
See page 2 for more information on choosing a car seat.



800-370-SEAT  
www.mdkiss.org

## Car Seat Features to Look For

- **Good size limits:** Check labels and instructions for height and weight limits that allow your child to use the car seat for a long time.
  - **For preemies and tiny babies:** A car seat that can be used rear facing for babies under 5 pounds.
  - **For growing babies:** A car seat that can be used rear facing to at least 30 pounds.
  - **For preschoolers:** A convertible or forward-facing-only car seat with a harness that can be used to 50 or more pounds and over 45 inches.
  - **For young school-age children:** A booster that can be used to at least 100 pounds and up to 57 inches.
- **A 5-point harness:** This type has straps that go over the shoulders, hips, and between the legs. Avoid car seats with a 3-point harness or that have a shield or tray. These are no longer made, and any that exist are too old to use.
- **Harness buckle:** Buckles come in many styles. They must make the button stiff enough so kids cannot unbuckle them. But make sure yours is easy for adults to use. Caregivers, especially those with hand problems, should find one that is not painful to buckle and unbuckle.
- **Harness adjuster:** A harness that snugs by pulling a strap at the front of the car seat is usually easier to use than one that adjusts on the harness or at the back of the car seat.
- **Chest clip:** Check that this clip on the harness is easy to open, close, and adjust.
- **Belt path:** The opening for the seat belt or LATCH strap should be easy to fit a hand through. Padding that can be lifted to reach the belt path from the front is helpful.
- **Seat belt lock-off:** Some car seats have a part that locks onto the car's seat belt. Check the instructions and make sure this part is easy to use correctly.
- **LATCH connectors:** Check your car manual to see if your car has LATCH. If it does, look for car seats with connectors that are easy for you to use. Many people feel connectors that push on and release by pushing a button are the easiest to use.
- **Recline guides:** They should be easy to see and read. These are most common on rear-facing car seats.
- **Angle adjuster foot:** Some rear-facing car seats can be reclined, as needed, using an adjuster foot. For others, you may need to place a rolled towel or foam roll under the front of the car seat to keep it reclined.



**Parts of a car seat:**

- |                      |                                   |   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Harness (5-point) | 6. Shoulder harness slot (1 of 2) | 11. Lower anchor strap(s) (detail shows connectors) |
| 2. Chest clip        | 7. Label(s)                       | 12. Base (rear-facing-only car seats)               |
| 3. Buckle            | 8. Recline guide                  | 13. Shell/carrier                                   |
| 4. Buckle strap      | 9. Belt path                      |   |
| 5. Harness adjuster  | 10. Angle adjuster foot           |   |

### Try Before You Buy

It is best if you can take the car seat to your car and install it before buying it. **Always** follow the instructions for the car seat and for the car. Make sure the car seat can be installed tightly. To check this, hold the car seat at the belt path and pull side to side and forward. It should not move more than one inch.

### Check a Second-Hand Car Seat Carefully

Whenever possible, use a new car seat. They are often safer and easier to use. If you do use a second-hand car seat, check it for problems. Make sure it has all its parts and instructions. Check if it has recalls. Any car seat that has been in a crash should not be used again. And follow a car seat's "do not use after" date—many should not be used more than 6 years. If you are unsure about any of this, it is not a good car seat for your child!

### Don't Rush to the Next Stage!

Keep your child in each stage listed on page 1 as long as possible. Moving too soon is a common mistake. Don't move to the next stage until your child has grown too tall or heavy to ride in his current stage.

### Resources

- National Vehicle Safety Hotline:** Car seat information, recalls, ratings: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153(tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)
- SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:** 5-Step Safety Belt Fit Test, recall list, handouts: 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)
- The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia:** [www.chop.edu/carseat](http://www.chop.edu/carseat)
- 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.)
- Find someone to help:** 866-732-8243, or look online:
  - [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org) (select Inspection under Installation Help)
  - <http://cert.safekids.org> (select Find a Tech)