



Car Safety Tips

Riding in a motor vehicle is the most dangerous thing your child does, no matter what his or her age. You can do much to prevent serious injury or death by heeding the following tips on car safety.

General Tips

- EVERYONE riding in the car should be properly restrained.
- Your child is more likely to buckle up if you do.
- ALL children under 12 years of age should ride in a rear seat.
- Infant car safety seats should be tilted at an angle of about 45 degrees, and the seat belt must be locked into position around the seat. If the seat is correctly installed, it should not wiggle more than one inch in any direction. The straps should come through the lower slots of the safety seat. They must fit snugly – you should not be able to get more than one finger between the straps and your baby's body. Be sure to put the chest protector at about the level of the baby's armpits to prevent the shoulder straps from sliding off.
- Installing a car seat properly can be difficult. You can get expert help from the following Web sites: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/CPSFitting/Index.cfm> or www.carseat.org.

Age-Specific Tips

Under 1 year. Babies under 1 year of age have heavy heads and relatively weak necks, which increases their risk of head and neck injuries in an accident. Babies should *always* ride in a car seat that faces backwards (toward the rear of the vehicle) in the back seat of the vehicle. At a minimum, they should remain rear-facing until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat's manufacturer. At a minimum, do not place your baby in a forward-facing car seat until he is *both* 12 months of age *and* 20 pounds.

1 year to 4 years. Children older than 1 year who weigh at least 20 pounds can ride facing forward but should stay in the back seat. When you install the new car seat, it should be upright and the harness straps should go through the upper slots. New cars will allow you to use tether systems that are much easier to install. The integral (built-in) car seats in some vehicles are usually safe for toddlers (check your owner's manual).

4 to 8 years. Children who weigh more than 40 pounds are too big for a car seat and too small to use a regular seat belt safely. The solution is a booster seat, preferably one with a high back, which will help protect your child's head and neck. Booster seats raise your child's body a few inches above the car seat so that the regular lap and shoulder seat belt fits properly. Boosters don't have to be attached directly to the vehicle seat, which makes them easier to use than car safety seats, and they let the child see out the window – a real benefit on a long trip.

9 to 12 years. Children from 9 to 12 years of age and at least 4 feet 9 inches in height should ride in the rear seat with the seat belt worn correctly (no putting the shoulder harness behind the back or under the arm!). Children this age are much more likely to wear a seat belt if you wear yours.

Over 12 years. Once your child is older than 12 years and at least 4 feet 9 inches in height and 80

pounds, she can ride in the front seat safely. But she still needs to wear a seat belt. Seat belts prevent more than 50% of serious injuries. A new risk arises when your child's friends start to learn to drive. Teenage drivers have more than five times as many crashes as older drivers, and their risk of crashing goes up when they carry passengers. Your child will be safer if she doesn't ride in a car with a teenager who is a new driver.

Teenage drivers. Some states have graduated licensing systems for teenage drivers to help protect them from the hazards of immaturity and inexperience. If your state does not have such a system, you can still help keep your teenage driver safe in several ways. After your teenager gets his learner's permit, he should drive only under adult supervision for at least six months, including some supervised driving at night and in bad weather. Once he passes the road test and gets a license, he should not carry passengers for six months. And even if he doesn't have to be home by 9 p.m., he should not drive after that time for the first year because teenage drivers have a high risk of serious crashes late at night.