

Is Your Child's Car Seat Safe?

By Kay Green, My Precious Kid, Copyright 2002

We keep hearing about how 4 out of 5 car seats are installed incorrectly. How can you be sure your child's is installed correctly? One way is to read the instruction manual that came with your child's car seat and your car's owner's manual. That will give you some good clues. You can also have it checked by your local fire station or car seat safety clinic.

Parent's January Magazine tells us the 8 most often made mistakes? Have you made any of them?
<http://www.parents.com/articles/health/5198.jsp>

Mistake #1: Seat Too Loose

Mistake #2: Harness Too Loose

Mistake #3: Facing Wrong Way

Mistake #4: Wrong Angle

Mistake #5: Retainer Clip Wrong

Mistake #6: Wrong Slots

Mistake #7: No Booster Seat

Mistake #8: Recalled Seat

Another mistake I see often is taking kids out of the 5-point harness too soon. The child needs to stay in the harness until they are tall enough that the car's seat belt crosses them at the correct position at their shoulder in the booster and they are over 40 pounds. When you switch to a booster with no harness remember to belt the booster seat into the car even when your child is not in it. If not, the booster seat can become a flyer projectile in a wreck.

Is your child in the right size car seat? I saw a mom with a 17 mo old in an infant car seat. She said "He is under 20 pounds so I can't move him" WRONG. Car seats have weight, height, and age requirements. Most babies will be out of the height requirements for an infant car seat at 6 months. Their feet should not extend past the end of the car seat. My daughter was less than 30 pounds in her 40 pound limit convertible car seat and I thought fine, but then saw the straps were not staying on her shoulders well. She was too tall for it and had to move to a booster seat that held 22-80 pounds.

Additionally, your child's car seat should have emergency contact info attached. In a car accident professionals need to be able to reach dad at work or grandma if you are not able to help your child. A car seat ID card with a medical release signature will protect your child in a car accident by giving medical professionals all the information they need to treat your child immediately.

Safety Pillows for car seats and booster seats can also protect your child. Some car seats come with them. I found one that connects thru the booster seat strap slots. It allows it to protect her neck, gives her neck added support when napping, and allows her to push it up out of the way when she does not need it. It does not end up on the floor either. My almost 3 year old loves hers and tells me "Thanks You Mommy" when I slide it into place for her.

Most state rules now require that children stay in the booster seat until 6 years AND 60 pounds. This means safer kids and fewer fatalities for children in car wrecks. I am glad to keep my child in her comfortable car seat. She is happier and healthier every time we go in the car. I also use it for every plane trip. Since she is so comfortable in her favorite booster seat she travels much better. Please take the time to be sure that your car seat is installed correctly, fits your child, has emergency contact information, and a safety pillow for their neck. In the event of a wreck you will be glad you covered all the bases.