

# Grandparents' Guide to Car Seats

## Buckling Up Your Precious Grandchildren

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013



### A Car Seat Refresher

All grandparents want the best for their grandchildren. Many grandparents today spend lots of time caring for grandchildren. Learning to use today's car seats correctly is part of being a 21<sup>st</sup> century grandparent.

**"But my kids survived just fine without car seats,"** say some. Back then, children who survived crashes were lucky—there were few safe car seats. The fact is that 30 years ago, roughly twice as many children died in crashes each year than do today. This is true, even though there is more traffic now, and children spend much more time in cars. Today, children benefit from safer cars and car seats designed for crash protection.

Car crashes are still the leading cause of death and serious injury to children. Using a car seat correctly is your grandchild's best defense. Buckling up also helps children behave better in the car, so they do not distract you while you drive. Modern car seats have been proven to prevent or reduce serious injury in all but the most severe crashes. However, they are very different to use than models of 25 or 30 years ago.

### CAR SAFETY BASICS

- Buckle up all children under age 13 in the back seat.
- Choose a car safety seat (car seat) that fits your grandchild, fits your vehicle, and is easy for you to use.
- Use the car seat instructions and car owner's manual for help installing and adjusting a car seat correctly.
- Make sure the car seat is installed tightly in the vehicle.
- Adjust the harness to be snug.
- Contact a Child Passenger Safety Technician if you have

problems or questions (see Resources).

Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride



### Choosing the Right Car Seat

If you take care of your grandchildren regularly, consider buying your own car seats for your car. There is not just one "best" car seat. More-expensive car seats are not always safer. All must pass the same strict crash tests. Choose a car seat that fits the child's age and weight, that can be installed tightly in your car(s), and that is easy for you to install and use correctly.

A new car seat is likely to be safer than a used one. It may be easier to use and have better safety features.

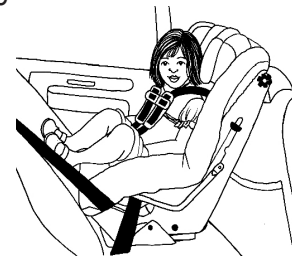
A used car seat may not be a real bargain and could be dangerous. It may have hidden safety problems. Check for recalls and make sure any have been repaired and that the car seat has all its parts and instructions. Don't use a car seat that is expired—usually when more than 6 years old. Most are marked with an expiration date.

### Which type of car seat to use?

Choosing the right type of car seat is important.

**ALWAYS** check labels or instructions for weight and height limits. Types include:

- 1. Rear-facing (A):** Use from birth to about 24 months; infant seats (up to 22 to 40 pounds) and convertibles (up to 30 to 45 pounds). Rear facing is the safest way to ride! Studies show that children who ride rear facing up to 24 months are **5 times safer** than children who are turned around earlier.
- 2. Forward-facing with a harness** (convertible and forward-facing seats): Use when the child no longer fits the size limits of his rear-facing car seat (**at the very earliest** 12 months AND 20 pounds) up to 40 to 90 pounds.
- 3. Booster with vehicle lap-shoulder belt:** Use after harness is outgrown (**at least** age 4) and until child fits the seat belt (usually about age 8 to 12). Do not use a booster with only a lap belt. (For options with lap belts, see Resources.)
- 4. Adult lap-shoulder belt:** Use when it fits correctly over the child's thighs and across the middle of the shoulder. Use the 5-Step Test for Seat Belt Use from SBS USA (see Resources). Use only a lap-only belt as a last resort.



A. Toddler riding rear facing in a convertible seat

## Car Seat Features to Try Before You Buy

- **Weight of the car seat itself:** Can you lift it easily? This is especially important if you will be taking it in and out of the car often.
- **Harness buckle:** Can you release the buckle easily? Buckles are required to be stiff enough so kids cannot unbuckle them. Some buttons are harder for adults to push than others, especially for people with arthritis.
- **Harness adjuster:** Can you adjust the straps easily? Look for a harness that adjusts with a strap at the front.
- **Harness chest clip:** Can you open and close it easily?
- **Seat belt slots (path):** Can you fit your hands into the labeled openings in the car seat to pull the belt through?
- **Lower LATCH connectors:** If your car has LATCH, look for connectors that push on and release with a push button.

## Where Should Your Grandchildren Ride?

The back seat is safest, even if the car does not have a passenger air bag in front. **NEVER** put a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag that is not turned off. That is very dangerous.

The center of the back seat is safest because it is farthest from any possible crash impact. However, the center can only be used if the fit is good there. It can be hard to install a car seat tightly in some center seats. A child using a booster seat **must** sit in a position with a lap-shoulder belt. Some cars do not have these in the center.

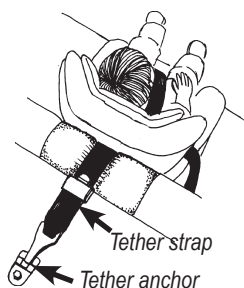
If you are not very strong and flexible, the center position may be a difficult place to install a car seat. It may also be hard for you to lift your grandchild into a car seat there. If this is a problem for you, install the car seat in the passenger side of the back seat. You won't have to climb into the car and you will be away from traffic when parked on the street.

## Installing a Car Seat Tightly

A car seat can do its job only if it is connected tightly to the car. Do not guess about installing a car seat. Follow the car owner's manual and the car seat instructions.

There are two ways to install a car seat: with a seat belt or with LATCH. Use one or the other (not both together). Use the one that works best for you to get the car seat in tightly. Always use the top tether strap (B) on a forward-facing car seat if your car has a tether anchor for attachment (see car manual). The tether provides extra protection in a crash.

If you need help, ask the child's parent or contact a local child passenger safety inspection location (see Resources).



**B.** Forward-facing car seat with tether strap

To tighten the seat belt or the LATCH system: Push down on the car seat while you pull to tighten the strap or belt. If the car seat faces forward, also attach and tighten the tether strap (B).

To test if the car seat is installed tightly: Hold the car seat where the LATCH strap or seat belt goes through the car seat. Pull forward and side to side. If the car seat moves more than one inch, it is not tightly secured.

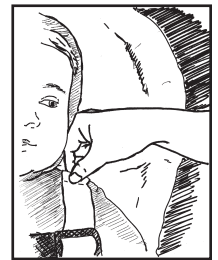
Installing a car seat can be easier for two people working together. If you are having trouble doing it yourself, ask a friend or the child's parent to help. Local child passenger safety technicians are available to teach you (see Resources).

## Using the Harness Properly

A harness that is not snug can lead to serious injury, so be sure to remove all the slack. ALWAYS read the instructions!

1. When rear facing, the straps must go through the car seat **at or below** the child's shoulders. The straps must go through the car seat **at or above** the child's shoulders when forward facing.

2. Make the harness snug so you cannot pinch any slack in the strap (C). It should be untwisted and equally snug over **all** parts of the child's body. Remove heavy clothing before putting the child in the harness.



**C.** Pinch test

## Teaching Grandchildren to Ride Safely

You can teach your grandchildren to enjoy riding buckled up. The car is not the place to "spoil" them by letting them ride unbuckled or in the front seat.

- Teach by example—always use your own seat belt and make sure everyone in the car buckles up. Unbuckled passengers can harm your grandchild in a crash.
- Make the ride a happy one. Bring along soft toys, small books to look at, or music you all can enjoy.
- If your grandchild tries to wiggle out of the car seat, he or she may be bored or the harness may be too loose.
- If the child continues to try to get out of the car seat, stop the car immediately in a safe place. Be firm, but gentle. Tell the child the car will not move until he or she stays buckled up. You may have to stop the car a few times, but children as young as 2 years old soon get the message. You can also do this with older children if they get loud or rowdy.

## Resources

Find a local Child Passenger Safety Inspection Location: 866-732-8243 or [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty), or [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

SBS USA: 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org) ("5-Step Test" for seat belt fit.)

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.)