



*"She'll stop crying if I hold her on my lap."* *"We're only going to the grocery store down the block."* *"He's sick and needs comforting."* *"She's hungry."* Do any of these quotes sound familiar? They're all common reasons parents give for not putting their children in appropriate child safety seats or safety belts. Unfortunately, unrestrained or improperly restrained children are far more likely to suffer severe injuries or die in motor vehicle mishaps than properly restrained children. In fact, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among children at every age after their first birthday. Even if you are a careful driver, you can't control other driver's behaviors or eliminate the possibility of a crash. And the forces that occur during a crash will make it impossible for you to "just hold on" to your child.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, child safety seats reduce the risk of death in passenger cars by about 70 percent for infants, and by about 55 percent for toddlers ages one to four.

The NHTSA recommends booster seats for children over 40 pounds until at least age 8. For children 9 years and older, car seatbelts reduce injury risk by about 50 percent. Unfortunately, many parents, unknowingly, incorrectly install car safety seats or improperly restrain their children. Here are some tips to help ensure your child is properly restrained while riding in your motor vehicle.

- Infants should ride in rear-facing seats as long as possible, at least until they are 12 months of age and weigh at least 20 pounds. The seat's harness strap should be routed through the harness slots that are at, or slightly below, the child's shoulder level. When fastened, the harness clip should be snug and at armpit level. The seat should be inclined at a 45-degree angle and securely fastened in place, using a locking clip, if needed, to prevent movement.
- Children over one year of age and who weigh between 20 and 40 pounds should be placed in forward-facing child safety seats. The seat's harness strap should be routed through the harness slot at, or slightly above, shoulder level. Keep the harness straps snug and flat. When fastened, the harness clip should be at armpit level. The seat should be in an upright position and securely fastened to prevent movement. If the seat moves more than one-inch left to right or back to front, it's too loose. In order to get a tight fit between the child restraint system and the vehicle seat, put your weight into the restraint system to compress the vehicle seat while tightening the seat belt as much as possible.
- Children over 40 pounds should be placed in a booster seat. There are different types of booster seats available on the market. Depending on your child's weight and height, you may need a high-back-style booster seat to properly protect your child.
- By around age 8, children can move to regular lap and shoulder belts. However, some vehicle restraint systems may not properly fit children weighing less than 80 pounds and who are less than 4 feet, 9 inches tall. In these instances, you may need to continue using a booster seat to properly protect your child.
- Regardless of the child restraint system used, all children ages 12 years and younger should ride in the back seat. This eliminates the injury risk from deployed front passenger-side airbags, and places children in the safest part of the vehicle in the event of an accident. Riding in the back seat is associated with a 46 percent reduction in the risk of fatal injury in cars with a front passenger-side airbag and at least a 30 percent reduction in the risk of fatal injury in cars with no front passenger-side airbag.

For more information about child safety seats, [click here](#) and/or visit the [National Transportation Safety Administration website](#)