

Keeping Children Safe in the Car

REDUCING THE RISK OF CRASH-RELATED INJURY

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages birth through 14. When used correctly, child safety car seats reduce the child's risk of serious injury and death by over 50 percent.

WHO MUST USE A CHILD SAFETY CAR SEAT?

Use a child safety car seat for your baby and any child under five every time they ride in the car, it's the law! The fine for not having a child correctly restrained is \$60; additionally, three points will be added to your driver's license.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT CAR SEAT?

The best car seat is the one that fits your child, fits your vehicle, and fits your family's needs in terms of budget, comfort and convenience. The age and size of your child will determine what type of car seat you need.

Here are some guidelines from the National Safe Kids Campaign:

- ▶ Infants must ride in a rear-facing car seat until they are at least 1 year old and weigh at least 20 pounds.
- ▶ Children over 1 year old and weighing between 20 and 40 pounds can be placed in a forward-facing car seat.
- ▶ Children over 40 pounds who no longer fit in the forward-facing car seat need to use a booster seat to correctly position the vehicle's lap and shoulder belts. Do not use a booster seat without a shoulder belt. Booster seats are needed until the child is big enough for the adult safety belt to fit correctly, usually around 8 years of age.
- ▶ Around age 8 a child will be big enough to sit all the way back on the seat of the car with knees bent easily over the edge of the seat, the lap belt low and flat across the hips, and the shoulder belt across the middle of the shoulder and chest. At this point, both the adult lap and shoulder belts should be used. Never put the shoulder belt under a child's arm or behind the back, as this increases the risk of severe injury in a crash.

Additional tips for choosing the best seat for your child:

- ▶ A car seat with a five-point harness system will provide the best fit and the most protection for babies and toddlers of all sizes. The harness should fit snugly with the chest clip at armpit level to keep the shoulder straps in place.
- ▶ A child may outgrow a car seat before exceeding the weight limit. It is important to be sure your child's head remains at least one inch below the top of the car seat to ensure proper protection of the child's head during a crash.
- ▶ Although booster seats with shields may meet current Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards for use by children who weigh 30 to 40 pounds, the American Academy of pediatrics does not recommend their use.
- ▶ Used car seats are not recommended, as they could be missing parts, be damaged from a previous accident, or may have been recalled. If you cannot afford to buy a new car seat, call your local health department or law enforcement office for assistance.

CAR SAFETY BY AGE

Less than 1 yr + less than 20 lbs
= **rear-facing car seat**

1 yr + 20 lbs = **forward-facing car seat**

Over 40 lbs = **forward-facing booster seat**

8 yrs and older = **back seat with adult seatbelt**



How do I make sure the car seat is installed correctly? Although most parents believe they have installed their child's car seat correctly, it is estimated that only 20 percent of children in car seats are properly restrained.

- ▶ Always read and follow all instructions for installing the car seat, including those in the owner's manual for the vehicle.
- ▶ The safest place for children to ride is in the back seat. Never install a child safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle equipped with a passenger air bag.
- ▶ If you need help to properly install a child safety seat, contact your local fire department for assistance.

Can a child travel safely in a pickup truck? As the popularity of trucks increases, many families are faced with the challenge of transporting children safely in a truck. Here are some guidelines from the National Safe Kids Campaign on protecting your family while traveling in a truck:

- ▶ Restrain children ages 12 and under in a forward-facing back seat. If there is no back seat, children should be placed in their appropriate child safety car seat with the vehicle seat pushed back as far as possible.
- ▶ Child safety car seats must not be used on side-facing or rear-facing jump seats.
- ▶ Never place a rear-facing infant seat in front of an air bag. Read the vehicle owner's manual to find out how to disable the passenger air bag.
- ▶ At least 80 percent of the child safety seat base must be on the truck's seat.
- ▶ Never allow anyone to travel in the cargo bed of a pickup truck. Cargo covers do not provide protection to passengers and can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.

Preventing Heat-Related Injury

Never leave a child unattended in the car, not even for a minute! Even during mild weather, temperatures inside a car can rise to dangerous levels in minutes. When left in a hot car, children's body temperatures rise much more quickly than adults, often causing permanent injury or even death.

Children have also died after becoming trapped in a car they entered without a caregiver's knowledge. Small children may crawl into a car's passenger area or trunk while playing and be unable to get back out.

Protect children from heat-related injuries in cars:

- ▶ Never leave a child in an unattended car, even with the windows down.
- ▶ Teach children not to play in, on or around cars.
- ▶ Always lock car doors and trunks, even at home, and keep keys out of a child's reach.
- ▶ See if you can have your car equipped with a trap-resistant trunk release.
- ▶ Once you get to your destination, check to make sure all children are out of the car, and don't forget infants and children who may have fallen asleep during the ride.
- ▶ Use window shades or a light covering over the seat of your parked car to keep child safety car seats and safety belts from becoming too hot.
- ▶ If a child becomes locked in a car, dial 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately.



Being a parent is hard, but there is help.
Call Florida's **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** parent helpline.

1-800-FLA-LOVE

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

