



# Child Safety Seats

## What You Need to Know



**Westchester**  
— MEDICAL CENTER —



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A traffic crash can happen to anyone at any time. A properly installed child safety seat (also called a car seat) can save your child's life. It keeps the child inside the vehicle, makes contact with the strongest parts of the body, spreads the force of the crash over a wide area of the body, helps the body slow down, and protects the brain and spinal cord.

Studies show that 3 out of 4 child safety seats are installed incorrectly. Children are also less likely to be restrained the older they get.

Keep your child safe by following these tips. Always use the right seat the right way on every ride.

# Types of Child Safety Seats

There are several types of child safety seats that are widely available: infant (rear-facing), convertible, combination, and booster seats.

## Babies & Toddlers

**Infant:** This is a rear-facing child safety seat, the safest position for children during transport. It should be used for babies and toddlers until the child is at least 2 years old or until the child reaches the maximum weight allowed by the car seat manufacturer. Infant seats are also convenient since you can install the base in the vehicle and simply unsnap the seat from the base.

**Convertible:** This is a rear-facing child safety seat that can be converted to a forward-facing child safety seat once the child has reached the maximum weight allowed by the car seat manufacturer for the rear-facing position. Sometimes new parents discover is that their convertible seat is too big for their newborn.



## Toddlers & Preschoolers

**Forward-facing:** Once your child has outgrown the rear-facing position, he can sit forward-facing. Most car seats on the market today that allow for the forward-facing position are convertible or combination seats. These are more economical seats since they adjust to your child's growth.

**Convertible:** This is a child safety seat that can be converted from rear-facing to forward-facing once the child has reached the maximum weight allowed by the car seat manufacturer for the rear-facing position.

**Combination:** This is a forward-facing child safety seat that can be converted to a booster seat once the child has reached the maximum weight specified by the car seat manufacturer for the car seat's harness.

## School-aged Children

**Booster:** This seat protects the child who is too big for a forward-facing car seat but is too small for a safety belt only. A booster seat uses the vehicle's safety belt instead of a harness and is designed for children who are about 4 years old. Check the weight and height information recommended by the booster seat manufacturer.

## Older Children

**Safety belts:** A child can transition from a booster seat to the vehicle's safety belts only when the child has reached the maximum weight or height recommended by the booster seat manufacturer. A child should not use safety belts only until he/she has reached the height of 4'9".

## Choosing a Child Safety Seat

- Choose a child safety seat that is appropriate for your child's weight.
- More expensive child safety seats are not necessarily safer. All car seat manufacturers are required to meet the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's minimum performance standards.
- Each new child safety seat comes with a registration card. It is important to send in the card so that you will be notified if the seat or any of its components are recalled due to safety issues.
- Keep all the labels and instructions on the seat. They provide important information that you will need later as your child grows.
- If you have a small vehicle or if additional children will be riding in the vehicle, you may want to choose a lower profile seat so that it does not take up a large portion of the vehicle's back seat.

### **Caution!**

*Be very careful about buying a second-hand child safety seat or using an old hand-me-down seat. Know the seat's history if you don't buy it new.*

- *The seat may have been recalled for safety reasons.*
- *It's very important to have the manufacturer's instructions and to know the seat has all of its parts.*
- *Check the expiration date on the seat. Don't use an expired seat.*
- *If the seat has been in a crash, it should not be used again.*

## Installing a Child Safety Seat

### Rear-facing Infant Seats

- Read and follow the child safety seat instructions.
- Place the child safety seat in the back seat of the vehicle away from any airbags.
- It is important to install the seat so that your baby is at the correct angle to ensure his/her breathing is not obstructed. If you have trouble installing the seat at the correct angle (about 30-45 degrees), use a rolled towel, rolled blanket, or foam pool noodle tucked into the crack where the vehicle's seat meets the vehicle's seat back to help position the car seat.





- Since 2002, all child safety seats and vehicles have been compatible with the LATCH system (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children). LATCH allows you to attach the child safety seat directly to lower anchors in your vehicle instead of using the safety belt to secure it, making installation safer and easier. Read your vehicle's owner's manual to locate the anchors and identify the best location to install the car seat. Most rear-facing infant seats do not have a top tether strap or hook since they generally do not use this equipment for installation.
- If using the vehicle's safety belt rather than the lower anchors, make sure the safety belt is routed through the correct belt path on the child safety seat and that it is securely locked in place. There should be no more than 1 inch of forward or side-to-side movement when correctly installed.
- Adjust the carrying handle of the child safety seat to the manufacturer's recommended angle.
- Secure your baby in the child safety seat with the harness by putting the harness straps over baby's shoulders and buckle at the crotch. Lock the chest clip, which should be at armpit level. The harness straps should be at or below your baby's shoulders. Adjust the level of the harness if necessary. Tighten the straps until they are snug and secure around the baby.
- If there is a gap between the harness buckle and the baby's crotch, use a thin blanket to fill the gap.
- Do the "pinch" test to make sure the straps are tight: Pinch the harness webbing up and down at the baby's shoulder level. Your fingers should slide off.

- Your baby's head should be at least 1 inch below the top of the car seat's shell.
- Have your child safety seat checked by a safety professional. Visit [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) for a location near you.

## Caution!

- *Never use a rear-facing child safety seat in the front seat near an air bag. The airbag in the front passenger seat can cause serious injury or death.*
- *Children should always travel in the back seat of the vehicle away from any airbags.*
- *Some rear-facing seats can be installed in the vehicle with or without the base. Don't install the seat without the base if the manufacturer does not recommend it.*
- *Don't use any products on the child safety seat that did not come with the seat. Add-ons can interfere with the seat's safety features and may even void the manufacturer's warranty and liability.*
- *Avoid bulky clothing like snow suits; use lighter weight clothing. Strap your baby into the seat, then use a blanket on top if necessary.*
- *Make sure the harness is not knotted, frayed, pinned, or damaged.*
- *Toys, mirrors, window shades, and other items can become flying projectiles in a vehicle crash. Avoid using them when you travel.*



## Convertible Seats

If your child is under the age of 2, he/she should travel in the rear-facing position (see above). Read and follow the child safety seat instructions to install the convertible seat in the rear-facing position.

If your child is 2 or older and has outgrown the rear-facing weight limits, he/she should travel in the forward-facing position:

- Read and follow the child safety seat instructions to install the convertible seat in the front-facing position.
- Place the child safety seat in the back seat of the vehicle away from any airbags.
- Since 2002, all child safety seats and vehicles have been compatible with the LATCH system (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children). LATCH allows you to attach the child safety seat directly to lower anchors in your vehicle instead of using the safety belt to secure it, making installation safer and easier. Read your vehicle's owner's manual to locate the anchors and identify the best location to install the car seat. Remember to secure the top tether strap to your vehicle's tether anchor bracket.
- If using the vehicle's safety belt rather than the lower anchors, make sure the safety belt is routed through the correct belt path on the child safety seat and that it is securely locked in place. There should be no more than 1 inch of forward or

side-to-side movement when correctly installed. Remember to secure the top tether strap to your vehicle's tether anchor bracket.

- Secure your child in the child safety seat with the harness by putting the harness straps over his/her shoulders and buckle at the crotch. Lock the chest clip, which should be at armpit level. The harness straps should be at or above your child's shoulders. Adjust the level of the harness if necessary. Tighten the straps until they are snug and secure around the child.
- Do the "pinch" test to make sure the straps are tight: Pinch the harness webbing up and down at the shoulder level. Your fingers should slide off.
- Your child's head should be at least 1 inch below the top of the car seat's shell.
- Have your child safety seat checked by a safety professional. Visit [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) for a location near you.

## Caution!

- *Children should always travel in the back seat of the vehicle away from any airbags.*
- *When you switch the convertible child safety seat from rear-facing to forward-facing, be sure to readjust the harness straps on the seat so that they are at or above the child's shoulders (rather than at or below the child's shoulders in the rear-facing position).*
- *Don't use any products on the child safety seat that did not come with the seat. Add-ons can interfere with the seat's safety features and may even void the manufacturer's warranty and liability.*
- *Avoid bulky clothing like snow suits; use lighter weight clothing. Strap your child into the seat, then use a blanket on top if necessary.*
- *Make sure the harness is not knotted, frayed, pinned, or damaged.*
- *Toys, mirrors, window shades, and other items can become flying projectiles in a vehicle crash. Avoid using them when you travel.*



## Combination Seats

Follow the instructions for forward-facing position above if your child has not yet reached the maximum weight specified by the car seat manufacturer for the car seat's harness. Read and follow the child safety seat instructions.

Follow the instructions for Booster Seats below if your child has reached the maximum weight specified by the car seat manufacturer for the car seat's harness.

## Booster Seats

- Read and follow the child safety seat instructions.
- Place the booster seat in the back seat of the vehicle.
- Use the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt with booster seats. The shoulder portion of the belt should cross the shoulder and the middle chest and not rub the child's neck. The lap portion of the belt should cross the hip bones or upper thighs, not the abdomen.
- If the booster seat does not have a back, adjust the vehicle's head restraint so the top of the head restraint is as high as the top of the child's head and as close to the back of his/her head as possible.

- Make sure your child uses a booster seat until he/she has reached the maximum size limit recommended by the car seat manufacturer.
- Have your child safety seat checked by a safety professional. Visit [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) for a location near you.

## Caution!

- *Children should always travel in the back seat of the vehicle away from any airbags.*
- *Do not use a lap belt only. Your child must be secured with a lap/shoulder belt.*
- *Don't use any products on the child safety seat that did not come with the seat. Add-ons can interfere with the seat's safety features and may even void the manufacturer's warranty and liability.*
- *Toys, mirrors, window shades, and other items can become flying projectiles in a vehicle crash. Avoid using them when you travel.*





## Safety Belts Only

When your child has reached the maximum size limit of the booster seat and is at least 4'9" tall, he/she may transition to safety belts only if:

- The child can sit all the way back against the vehicle's seat without slouching and his/her knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat.
- The shoulder part of the belt crosses the shoulder between the neck and arm and doesn't rub on the neck.
- The lap part of the belt crosses the hip bones or upper thighs, not the abdomen.
- The child can remain seated like that for the entire trip.

*Tip: Adjust the vehicle's head restraint so the top of the head restraint is as high as the top of the child's head and as close to the back of his/her head as possible.*



## Caution!

- *Children should always travel in the back seat of the vehicle until they are ready to drive. If younger children are restrained in child safety seats in the back seat and an older child who is big enough for a safety belt only must ride in the front seat, position the front seat as far back away from the airbag as possible.*
- *Do not use a lap belt only. Lap/shoulder belts provide upper body protection for the head, neck, and spine.*
- *Do not let your child put the shoulder belt behind his/her back or under his/her arm.*

Children learn by example. They may not do what you say, but they will do what you do. Always buckle up before you drive – even if it's just down the street.





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