

# Common Car Seat Mistakes



## Rear-Facing Car Seat

Children under age one should always ride in a rear-facing car seat.



## Forward-Facing Car Seat

Your child should remain in rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat manufacturer.



## Booster Seat

Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it is time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat



## Seat Belt

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly (lap belt must lie snugly across the thighs, not the stomach)



Common car seat mistakes can compromise the safety of children during car travel. After finding a car seat that is the right fit for your child's height and weight, you need to ensure the car seat is properly installed. Here are some of the most common mistakes:

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**Incorrect Installation:** Many car seats are installed improperly. This includes not securing the seat tightly enough to the vehicle, using incompatible or expired seat belts, or failing to follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation.

2

**Forward-Facing Too Soon:** Transitioning a child to a forward-facing position before they reach the appropriate age, weight, or height can increase the risk of injury in the event of a crash. It's important to follow guidelines regarding when to switch from rear-facing to forward-facing seats.

3

**Loose Harness Straps:** The harness straps should be snug against the child's body, with no slack. Loose straps can allow the child to move too much, and if too loose, your child may be thrown forward during a crash.

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**Incorrect Harness Height:** This is a common mistake. The harness straps should be adjusted to the appropriate height for the child's size. For rear-facing seats, the harness should be at or below the child's shoulders. For forward-facing seats, the straps should be at or above the shoulders. You will need to adjust the harness straps as your child grows.

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**Improper Use of Retainer Clips:** The retainer clip, also known as the chest clip, should be positioned at armpit level to keep the harness straps in the correct position. Placing it too low or too high can compromise the effectiveness of the harness.

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**Used, Expired or Recalled Seats:**

While buying a used car seat may seem economical, it is best to buy a new one instead. Car seats have an expiration date, typically around six years after the manufacture date. Using an expired seat or one that has been recalled due to safety concerns poses a significant risk to the child's safety. If a used car seat was in a crash, it may have a defect or may be missing certain parts. Another reason to buy a new car seat is that it comes with instructions for assembly and use.



7

**Incorrect Seat for Child's Size:** One difficulty with choosing the right car seat is knowing which size is best for your child. You can use your child's weight, height, and age to determine the best car seat. Using a car seat that is not appropriate for the child's size and age can lead to inadequate protection in the event of a crash. These measurements are usually on the car seat manufacturer's instructions so you know if the car seat will fit your child's dimensions and age. Keep in mind, height and weight are better measurements than age because of variations in children's growth.

8

**Installing the Car Seat in the Front Seat:** While it may be tempting to place your child's car seat in the front so you can keep a eye on your precious cargo, placing a car seat in the front seat, especially if it is equipped with an active airbag, can be dangerous. The back seat is generally the safest location for children to ride in a vehicle. If your vehicle only has one row of seats, be sure to turn off the air bag.



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**Not Registering Your Car Seat:** Like food and cars, manufacturers also issue recalls for car seats. This can happen if they've had a design or manufacturing defect. So it's important to stay up-to-date on car seat recalls.

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**Not Replacing After a Crash:** If a car has been involved in a moderate to severe crash, your child's car seat should be replaced, even if it appears undamaged. The structural integrity of the seat may be compromised, reducing its ability to protect the child in future accidents.

Regularly reviewing car seat safety guidelines and ensuring proper installation and usage can significantly reduce the risk of injury to children while traveling in vehicles.

*RESOURCES*

**Car Seat Recall Info**

<https://www.nhtsa.gov/>

**Child Passenger Safety**

<https://www.fdot.gov/safety/programs/op/cps.shtm>

**Want a Car Seat Check?**

Many fire and police stations offer free car seat checks.