

Make sure child passengers are safe in vehicles

September 17-23 is National Child Passenger Safety Week. The primary goal is to make sure parents and caregivers are correctly using proper car seats for their children.

According to Safe Kids Worldwide, car seats and booster seats are the basic protection systems for passengers who are too small to get the full safety benefits from adult seat belts. The goal of car seats is to provide small children with the same protection, or better, than adults obtain from seat belts and other safety equipment built into a vehicle. They are designed to keep children within the vehicle and close to their original seating position, prevent contact with harmful interior surfaces or other occupants, and provide “ride-down” by gradually decelerating the child as the vehicle deforms and absorbs energy from crash forces. For this to work properly, the correct seat must be selected for the child’s height, weight, and developmental levels.

Many children are advanced to the next seat stage before they are truly ready, which puts them at

greater risk for injury in a crash. Children between the ages of 12–24 months are up to five times better protected by riding rear-facing to the limits of their convertible car seat. Oregon’s child passenger safety seat laws changed earlier this year requiring child passengers under age 2 to use a child seat with harness in a rear-facing position, unless the child turned one year of age prior to May 26, 2017. Convertible seats with higher rear-facing weight and height limits allow many children to ride rear-facing well past the age of 2. Children are also being moved prematurely from harnessed car seats into booster seats, as well as from booster seats into adult seat belts, which puts them at greater risk for injury if the seat belt does not fit them correctly.

For all children under the age of 13, the back seat is the safest place for them to ride. They are better protected from head-on collisions, which constitute about 60 percent of all crashes. In addition, they are not at risk for being injured by the passenger air bag, which is designed for adult protection

in conjunction with a seat belt. Familiarize yourself with the location of the air bags in your vehicle, with the help of your vehicle owner’s manual. A rear-facing car seat should NEVER be placed in front of an active air bag. Considering the best location for your child’s car seat should also include the needs of other passengers who ride in the vehicle and the seating position that will provide an optimal installation for your child’s car seat. The middle seat in the back is often referred to as the “best” location for car seats because of the protection from side impact crashes, but any back-seat position is a preferred location to install car seats.

Also consider the needs of your family; for example, if you often park on a busy street, place your child’s car seat on the curbside as opposed to the street side for optimal protection for you and your child when entering and exiting the vehicle.

It is estimated that 46 percent of car seats on America’s roads are installed incorrectly. A car seat that is incorrectly installed will not provide optimal protection in a crash

situation, and may put your child’s safety at risk. While great strides have been made in reducing child fatalities and injuries since the 1970s, over half of children killed are either improperly restrained or completely unrestrained. Car seats can be installed with either the seat belt or the lower anchors, and forward-facing seats should always utilize the tether. Tether non-use in forward-facing car seat installation is one of the most common installation errors, yet correct use can significantly decrease the risk of head injuries in a crash.

Correct harnessing or seat-belt fit ensures your child is securely positioned in a car seat, booster seat, or vehicle seat, and able to take advantage of the crash protection that the harness or belt provides. The harness holds the child down low in the car seat so he/she does not slide up and out of the car seat in a crash. Incorrect harnessing — often a loose harness or a retainer clip that is too low — is an extremely common misuse. Correct seat-belt fit, for children in boosters or transitioning out of boosters is very important and also a

common error.

Oregon state law requires children less than 40 pounds be restrained in a child seat.

- Children under 2 years of age or weighing less than 20 pounds must be restrained in a rear-facing child seat. Children who turned one year of age prior to May 26, 2017 AND weigh more than 20 pounds may be forward-facing. It is encouraged to leave them rear-facing as long as possible.

- Children over 40 pounds must be restrained in either a forward-facing five-point harness with a tether or a booster seat appropriate for their size until they reach 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches tall AND the adult seatbelt system fits them correctly by passing the five-step test:

1. Back against the seat.
2. Knees bent comfortably at the edge of the seat.
3. Shoulder belt rests on the collar bone.
4. Lap belt across the hips.
5. And the child stays like this for the whole trip.

For more information or to schedule a car-seat check, contact Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire District or visit www.childsafetyseat.org.

Thank you to all of those who have been working diligently to keep Sisters safe and our community strong.

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