

Stages of Car Seat Use

Stage 1 – Birth to at least 2 years.

Children are best protected riding in a rear-facing car seat as long as possible.

- ✓ **Harness Straps:** at or below Shoulder level.
- ✓ **Harness Clip:** always at armpit level.
- ✓ **Straps:** snug with not slack; “Pinch Test” and remove slack from hip area.
- ✓ **Angle:** use angle indicator on seat or base to determine proper recline.
- ✓ **Installation:** less than 1 inch of movement when tested at the seat belt path; use EITHER a locked seat belt or an approved Lower Anchors and Tethers for children (LATCH) position.
- ✓ **In vehicle:** rear-facing in the back seat, never in the front of an active air bag.

Stage 2 - Approximately 2 – 5 Years.

All forward -facing car seat harnesses can be used until a child reaches a minimum of 40 pounds. Many harnesses have higher weight limits. Check the label on the seat.

- ✓ **Harness Straps:** at or above shoulder level.
- ✓ **Harness Clip:** always at armpit level.
- ✓ **Straps:** snug with no slack; “Pinch Test”
- ✓ **Angle:** check car seat owner’s manual for specific requirements.
- ✓ **Installation:** less than 1 inch of movement when tested at the seat belt path; use EITHER a locked seat belt or an approved LATCH position ALWAYS secure the top of the seat using the tether strap when available. Check manual for weight limits.
- ✓ **In Vehicle:** forward-facing in the back seat.

Stage 3 – Recommended 5 years and 50 pounds – 4’9”

Booster seats help protect children by lifting them so the lap and shoulder seat belt connects with their strong bones. Children should remain in a booster seat until the seat belt fits correctly without it.

- ✓ **Seat Belt:** always use a lap and shoulder belt with a booster.
- ✓ **Head Support:** child must have heads support at least to the top of the ears from either the high back booster, the head restraint or the vehicle seat back.
- ✓ **In Vehicle:** in the back seat.

Stage 4 – Minimum 4’9”

Your child is ready for the lap and shoulder belt if to can answer “YES” to each of the following questions.

- ✓ Is your child at least 4 feet, 9 inches?
- ✓ Does the lap belt sit low across the upper thighs?
- ✓ Does the shoulder belt lie across the collarbone-not touching the neck and not off the shoulder?
- ✓ When the child’s bottom is scooted all the way back against the seat, do his or her knees bend at the edge of the seat?
- ✓ Can the child stay seated that way for the entire trip?
- ✓ **Seat Belt:** lap and shoulder belt.