

Child car seats use their own restraints that are positioned correctly for the size of your child.

Installing Your Child's Car Seat

LATCH makes installing a car seat very simple. The tether strap in forward-facing seats is often overlooked or misunderstood by parents. The tether strap prevents a forward-facing car seat from flipping forward in a crash or a hard stop. Look in your owner's manual to find where the anchors are in your car.

Start off by carefully reading your vehicle owner's manual together with a car seat instruction manual to determine how to install your child's car seat. You'll need to know how you're going to secure the seat in your car. You'll either use the latch system or the seat belts.

Car Seat Checklist

Modern-day car seats are designed specifically for babies and work very well in preventing serious injury when used correctly. That is the key, though. They must be used correctly. The following is a checklist you can use before you ride with your child in a vehicle.

- ☐ Check your car seat's expiration date. All car seats have expiration dates somewhere on them, usually on the manufacturer's label. Six (6) years is the general expiration recommendation by the manufacturer. The reason for these limits involve possible degradation of the plastic shell or other parts, the possible loss/breakage of parts, and the fact that older seats sometimes do not meet current government safety standards.¹
- ☐ Read the instruction booklet that comes with your car seat. Check to be sure the seat is the correct size for your child's age and weight.²
- ☐ Decide where the car seat should be installed. The safest place in the vehicle is the rear center seat. Never put a rear-facing car seat in front of an airbag.³
- ☐ Every car seat needs to be installed using either the lower anchors (LATCH) or the seat belt to secure it in place. If you choose to use a seat belt to install your car seat, pay close attention to how to lock your seat belt in the vehicle owner's manual.²
- ☐ Because every car seat and vehicle is different, it's important to follow all instructions carefully. Follow the manufacturer's installation directions. The car seat must be secured tightly in the vehicle. It should not move side-to-side or front-to-back more than 1 inch when pulled at the belt path. If it is a forward-facing seat and has a tether strap, connect it to the tether anchor and tighten. This step is very important as it limits forward head movement in a crash.²
- ☐ Check to see that the harness straps are not twisted. Are the harness straps in the slot at or below the infant's shoulder (rear-facing) and at or above the toddler's shoulder (forward-facing) in the reinforced slot?² The greatest degradation of car seat safety results from the combination of a slightly loose harness with mild twisting and having the harness straps positioned too far below the shoulders.⁴
- ☐ When you buckle your child in, check the harness straps. They should be snug. The harness is snug enough when extra material cannot be pinched at the shoulder.²

- ❑ Check the harness chest clip. It should be at armpit level to hold harness straps over the shoulders.²
- ❑ Do you buckle up every time you get in the car to go somewhere? Everyone in the car should model “buckling up.” Make it a rule that the car does not go until all the buckles are snapped.³

Make sure your car seat is installed correctly. Go to **www.nhtsa.gov** to look up a Child Car Seat Inspection Station near you. This service is free and will give you an opportunity to see if you have done it correctly. It may take a few minutes, but those few minutes may save your child from serious injury or death.

Child passenger restraint requirements vary based on age, weight and height. Often, this happens in three stages: infants use rear-facing infant seats; toddlers use forward-facing child safety seats; and older children use booster seats.

Requirements also vary by the state you live in. See the laws in your state at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website: <http://www.nhtsa.gov>

Your child's safety depends on you and your correct use of your car seats and restraints.

Resources include:

1. “Car Seat Expiration - When Do Car Seats Expire?” Graco Baby, www.gracobaby.com/en-US/carseat-expiration. Accessed 1/22/2019
2. “Car Seats and Booster Seats.” NHTSA, United States Department of Transportation, www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats#35091. Accessed 1/22/2019
3. “Keep Child Passenger’s Safe.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 Sept. 2021, www.cdc.gov/features/passengersafety/index.html. Accessed 11/23/2021
4. ESV Conference Proceedings. “The Cumulative Effect of Multiple Forms of Minor Incorrect Use in Forward Facing Child Restraints on Head Injury Risk.” IndexSMART, NHTSA: Enhanced Safety of Vehicles, 2011, www-esv.nhtsa.dot.gov/Proceedings/22/isv7/main.htm. Accessed 1/22/2019