

# Meeting the Toddler Car Seat Challenge

## Keeping Them Safe and Happy

### Car Seat Safety Basics

- Use the center of the back seat if possible. This is the safest position.
- Keep your toddler rear-facing as long as possible. A rear facing car seat protects children better to at least age 2. Convertible seats can face the rear up to 30 to 35 pounds. See page 2.
- ALWAYS follow the car seat instructions and the car owner's manual. If you have questions, find a local child passenger safety technician (see Resources).
- Place harness straps in the correct position. The straps must come out at or above the child's shoulders in a forward-facing seat. For some convertible seats, the harness straps must be in the highest position.
- Adjust the harness to be snug. Your child should not be able to lean forward.
- Keep your child in a seat with a harness as long as possible. The straps hold a child in place if she is wiggly or falls asleep in the car.
- ALWAYS use your seat belt. Kids learn from your example. Make sure everyone in the car (grandparents, friends, and older children) buckles up also.

### Danger: Air Bags in the Front Seat

If a forward-facing child must ride in front, slide the vehicle seat all the way back and make sure the harness is snug. Turn off the air bag, if you can. NEVER put a rear-facing child in front unless the air bag has been turned off.



### Keeping Control with a Toddler in the Car

A toddler can test your patience as a parent. Children from age 1 to 4 are learning new skills and feeling more independent. It is normal for young children to test you by trying to do what they want. They can learn how to undo buckles and wiggle out of straps. They can get bored easily and try to escape. There is no "escape-proof" car seat.

### Surviving Car Seat Struggles

- Insist that your toddler **must** ride in his car seat on every trip. Make no exceptions. If you let him ride unbuckled once, he will try to get out often. Remember you buckle him up to keep him from getting hurt.
- Make sure the harness is snug. If he can lean forward in the seat or get his shoulders out, the straps are too loose.
- Use the parent-tested "Stop the Car" method. Stop the car in a safe place when a child does not follow your rules. Be very firm and stay calm. Tell him the car will not go until he is back in his seat. If you **always** do this, he will learn quickly.
- Make sure everyone who drives your child also buckles him up on every trip.
- Use positive rewards. Give your child praise and hugs when he rides quietly and stays in his seat.
- Give your child things to do. If she fights being put into her car seat, distract her with a toy or talk to her.
  - Keep small picture books and soft toys for use only in the car.
  - Talk with your child about things that she can see out the window.
  - Play music or story tapes or sing children's songs with her.
- Stop often to run around on long trips.
- If your child keeps escaping, you could try a vest that closes in the back (E-Z-ON Products; see Resources).



Keeping toddlers buckled up can be one of the toughest challenges for parents.



Let him know you like what he does. "Good job!"



A book or special toy will keep her happy in the car.

## Car Seats for 1-, 2-, and 3-year-olds

Keep your toddler rear facing as long as possible. Research shows that children up to age 2 are safer in a rear-facing car seat. Most convertible seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 35 pounds.

There are two kinds of forward-facing car seats for toddlers. These car seats have full harnesses. Continue to use a seat with a harness as long as the child fits. (Check label or instructions.) A car seat with a higher weight limit for the harness is a good choice for toddlers who are heavier than most children their age.

- 1) **Convertible car seat:** faces the rear or the front of the car. Some can only be used forward facing up to 40 pounds. Others can be used up to 50 to 80 pounds. Avoid a seat with a shield; it may not fit a child as well or as long as a 5-point harness.
- 2) **Forward-facing car seat:** This type can be used up to 40 to 80 pounds with a harness. Many have a removable harness. This kind can be made into a booster seat for an older child. Avoid using a booster seat for children under age 4. They generally are not mature enough to sit still. A few vehicles have built-in child seats.

### The “best” car seat for your toddler:

- fits your child’s weight and height with room to grow,
- can be installed tightly in your car—try before buying,
- has a harness that is easy to buckle and adjust to fit snugly.

### Seat belts are not enough for a child at 40 pounds!

Most kids do not fit well in lap-shoulder belts until at least 8 to 10 years old. When a child reaches 40 pounds, there are two options:

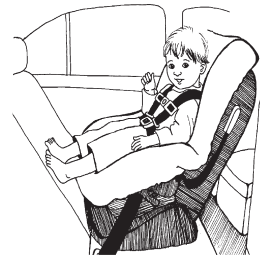
- 1) **Car seat, safety vest, or harness with a higher weight limit:** Use if your car has no shoulder belts in the back seat or if your child still needs a harness. There are a several products with harnesses for children weighing up to 50 to 80 pounds. Some can later be used as a booster. For a product list, go to [www.saferidenews.com](http://www.saferidenews.com).
- 2) **Booster seat:** Use if your car has lap-shoulder belts in the back seat.

### Second-hand car seat? Check it carefully before using

A second-hand car seat may have hidden safety problems. Make sure any recalls have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions. If the car seat has been in a crash, it should **not** be used again. Check for an expiration date. If there is none, avoid using a car seat over 6 years old. Newer car seats are easier to use and often have better safety features.

### Resources

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (recall list, general advice):  
888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)  
SafetyBeltSafe Helpline: 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)  
Find a local car seat inspection station: 866-732-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)  
General parenting tips: [www.positiveparenting.com](http://www.positiveparenting.com); [www.tnpc.com](http://www.tnpc.com)  
E-Z-ON Products: 800-323-6598, [www.ezonpro.com](http://www.ezonpro.com).  
Other useful websites:  
[www.aap.org/parents/html](http://www.aap.org/parents/html), [www.chop.edu/carseat](http://www.chop.edu/carseat), [www.saferidenews.com](http://www.saferidenews.com)



**Above:** A toddler in a rear-facing convertible car seat.



**Right:** A larger child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

## Install Your Child’s Car Seat Correctly

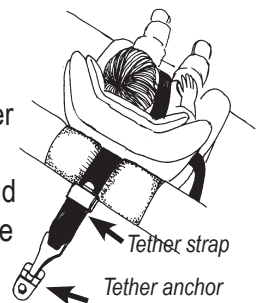
**ALWAYS** follow the instructions for the car seat and for the car.

The center of the back seat is the safest position for a car seat.

Fasten the car seat tightly to the car with the seat belt or LATCH lower straps. Use whichever gives the tightest fit. In most vehicles, a seat belt must be used in the center (check the car manual). Do NOT use both, unless the instructions say it is okay. Press down on the car seat to tighten the belt or straps. The car seat should not move more than one inch forward or side to side.

Do not use LATCH straps if your child’s weight is greater than allowed in the car manual.

**Always** use the tether strap (picture, right). A tether makes the car seat **much** safer. Check car manual and car seat instructions for more information.



### WARNING: Keep Unused Seat Belts Away from Kids

A child could be seriously injured if a shoulder belt wrapped around his or her neck and got locked. Teach children not to play with seat belts. Keep unused seat belts away from them. One way to do this is to buckle the belt before installing the car seat with LATCH. For unused belts next to a child or when a child is in a booster, you could lock the retractor after buckling the seat belt (see car manual for more information).