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Services

**Texas Department of State
Health Services**

Buckle Up at Every Age Ride Safe at Every Stage

Child Passenger Safety Education

Safe Riders

Objectives

By the end of the presentation, attendees will:

- Learn about Texas child occupant safety laws;
- Learn child passenger safety best practice recommendations;
- Understand recommendations by car seat stage; and
- Learn about child passenger safety resources.

Child Passenger Safety – The Big Picture

The Good News:

- Many child fatalities from vehicle crashes are preventable.
- Proper use of child safety seats reduces a child's risk of serious injury and fatalities in a crash.
- Seat belts reduce the risk of death and serious injury for older children and adults.



Texas Occupant Laws



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Texas Laws (1 of 2)

Child occupant protection – All children **less than age 8** must ride in a car seat or booster seat, unless the child is **4 feet, 9 inches or taller**. The child safety seat system **MUST** be installed according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Passengers – All passengers who no longer require a car seat or booster seat should **always** use a seat belt, **regardless of seating position**.



Texas Laws (2 of 2)

Unattended Children in Vehicles –
Children younger than age 7 must be supervised by someone that is at least age 14.*

Distracted Driving Law – Use of a wireless communication device while driving is prohibited. No texting while driving.**



* [Texas Penal Code Section 22.10 – Leaving a Child in a Vehicle](#) . Last visited Jan. 10, 2025.

** [Statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/TN/htm/TN.545.htm#545.4251](#). Last visited Jan. 10, 2025.

Car Seat Stages



REAR-FACING CAR SEAT



FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT



BOOSTER SEAT



SEAT BELT

Stage 1: Rear-Facing Seats



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Stage 1: Rear-Facing Seat Types

A **rear-facing car seat** is one that **reclines** and **faces the rear** of a vehicle.



Rear-facing Only



Convertible



Rear-Facing Seat Overview

English



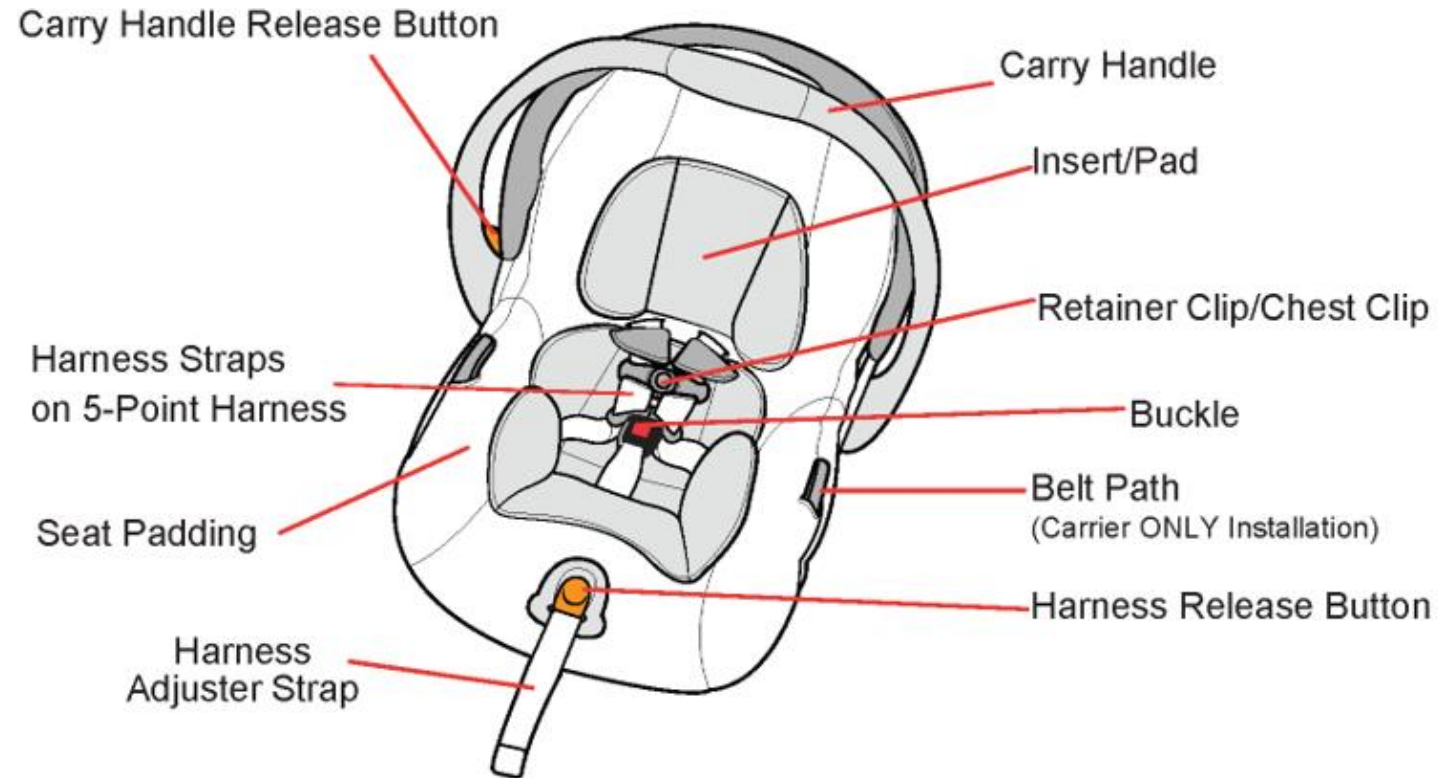
Click the link to watch the video: [Car Seat Safety By Age: Infants in Rear-facing Seats \(Children's Hospital of Philadelphia\)](#)

Rear-Facing Parts and Functions (1 of 4)

Car Seat Parts/Functions

Carrier

Part names will vary by seat type and manufacturer. Be sure to read the car seat instruction manual.



Rear-Facing Parts and Functions (2 of 4)

Car Seat Parts/Functions

CONTINUED

Carrier



Rear-Facing Parts and Functions (3 of 4)

Car Seat Parts/Functions

CONTINUED

Detachable Base

Instruction Manual Storage Location
(Inside Base)

Recline Indicator
I

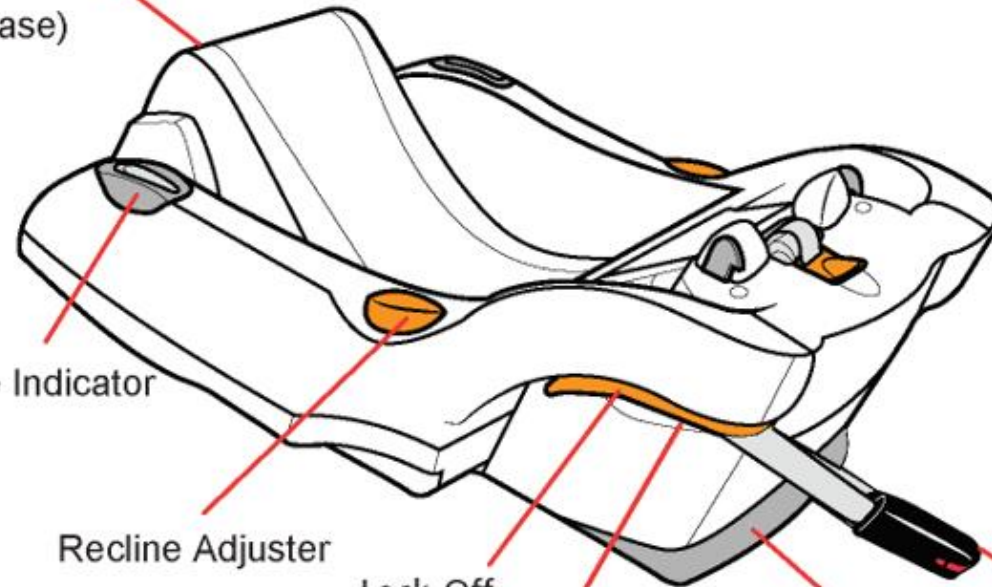
Recline Adjuster

Lock-Off

Belt Path

Recline
Adjustment

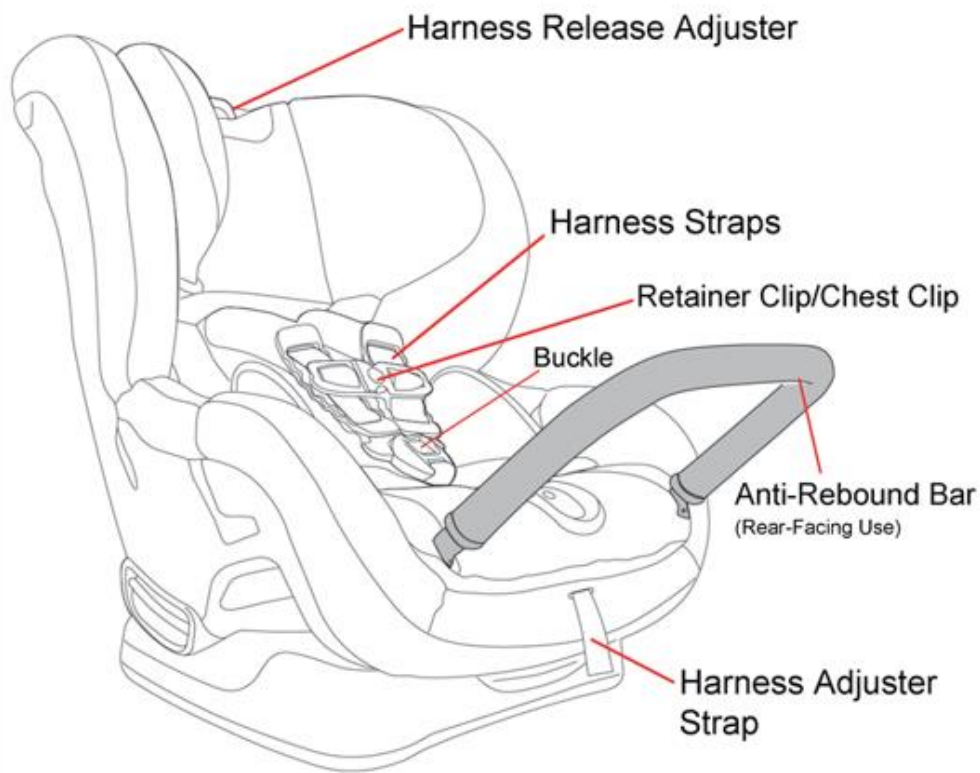
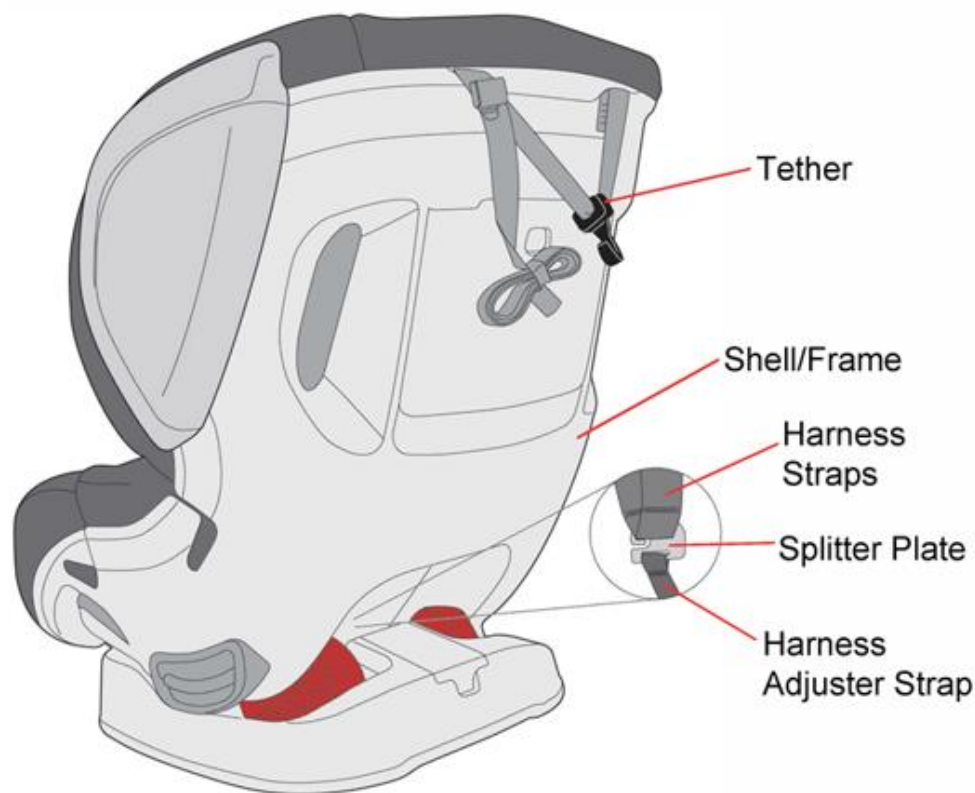
Lower Anchor
Connector



Rear-Facing Parts and Functions (4 of 4)

Car Seat Parts/Functions

Convertible Car Seat



Rear-Facing Seat Harness

Before you go:

- Route the harness through the harness slot **at** or **below** shoulder level.
- Buckle the child correctly in the harness.
- Check there are no twists in the harness.
- Tighten the harness to fit snug on the child (pinch test). Remove all visible slack.
- Check the harness clip is at **armpit level**.



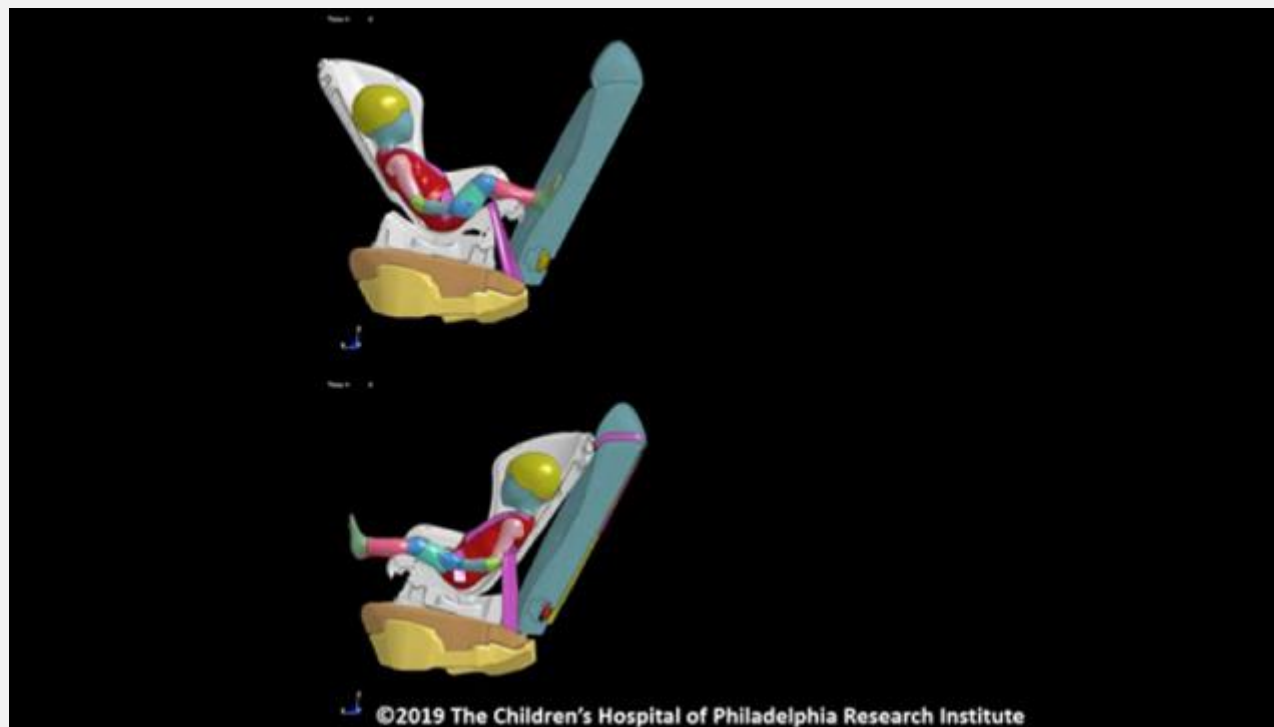
Rear-Facing Seat Angle Position

Adjust the recline adjustment to the correct angle position.
Follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions.



Why Stay Rear-Facing?

Riding rear-facing spreads the crash forces across the shell of the child safety seat and protects the infant's head, neck, and spine in a crash.



Click the link to watch the video: [Simulation of a 18-month-old Child in a Rear-facing Versus Forward-facing Child Safety Seat](#)

Rear-Facing Child Safety Seat Tips

- **Use child safety seats only for travel in the vehicle.**
- **Avoid** thick jackets or clothing while baby is harnessed in child safety seat.
- **Never** install a child safety seat in the front seat, in front of an active air bag.
- **Children should ride in their rear-facing child safety seat until they reach the maximum weight or height limit allowed by the car seat manufacturer.**



*More helpful information for parents of newborns: dshs.texas.gov/maternal-child-health/maternal-and-child-health-publications.

Stage 2: Forward-Facing Seats



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Forward-Facing Seat Options



Convertible



Combination

Forward-Facing Seat Overview

English



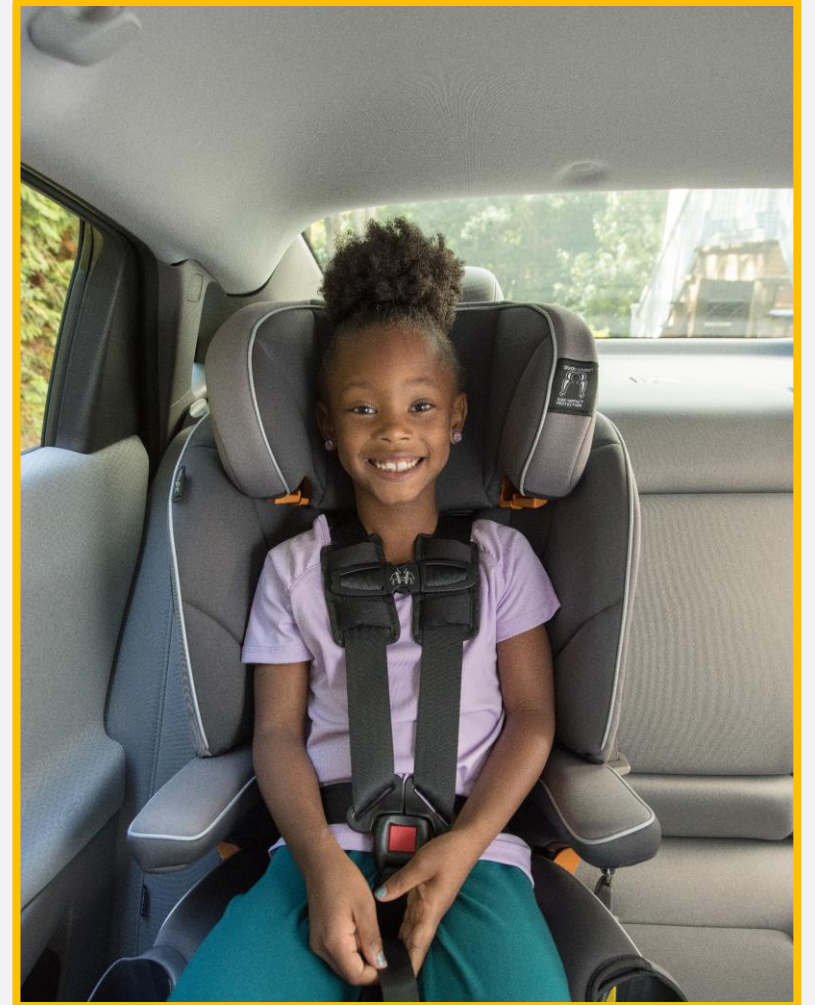
Click the link to watch the video: [Car Seat Safety By Age: Toddlers in Forward-facing Seats \(Children's Hospital of Philadelphia\)](#)

Forward-Facing Harness

Before you go:

- Route the harness through the harness slot **at** or **above** shoulder level.
- Buckle the child correctly in the harness.
- Check that there are no twists in the harness.
- Tighten the harness to fit snug on the child (pinch test). Remove all visible slack.
- Check the harness clip is at **armpit level**.

*Remember to avoid thick jackets and clothing under the harness.



Forward-Facing Seat Tips

- When children outgrow their rear-facing seat, they can ride forward-facing.
- Children should remain in a forward-facing child safety seat with a full harness until they reach the maximum height or weight allowed by the car seat manufacturer.
- When forward-facing, the harness absorbs and distributes the crash forces.



Stage 3: Booster Seats



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Booster Seat Options



Combination



Booster



Backless Booster

Booster Seat Overview

English



Click the link to watch the video: [Car Seat Safety by Age: Booster Seat Safety from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#)

Why Booster Seats?



Backless Booster



**High Back
Booster**

Booster seats protect children who have outgrown a child safety seat with a harness but are too small to use a seat belt only. Booster seats boost the child up in the vehicle seat so the seat belt fits correctly.

There are **two types of booster seats** – backless booster and high-back booster.

Booster Seat – Backless Version



Backless booster seats should:

- Only be used when the vehicle seat has a head restraint;
- **Always** be used with a lap **and** shoulder belt;
- Allow the lap belt to be placed low across the hips touching the upper thighs and the shoulder belt across the chest, away from the neck; and
- Allow the child's knees to bend comfortably over the seat so the child does not slouch.

Booster Seat – High Back Version

High back booster seats should:

- **Only** be used when the vehicle seat has no head restraint;
- **Always** be used with a lap **and** shoulder belt;
- Allow the lap belt to fit snug across the hips and upper thighs, and the shoulder belt across the chest away from the neck; and
- Allow the child's knees to bend comfortably over the seat so the child does not slouch.



Booster Seat Tips

- Children should use a booster seat **until the vehicle seat belt fits correctly *across the hips and over the chest*** (typically between ages 8-12).
- Most children properly fit in a seat belt when they reach 4 foot, 9 inches (57 inches).
- **Children should use their booster seat as directed by the booster seat manufacturer.**
- Secure booster seats with the vehicle seat belt when not being used to avoid it potentially becoming a projectile in a crash.



Stage 4: Seat Belts



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Seat Belts

Most children will need a booster seat until they have reached 4 foot, 9 inches tall and are between ages 8 and 12.

- Children should ride in the vehicle's **back seat** until they are at least age 13.
- **Always** use a lap **and** shoulder belt.



Seat Belt Fit Test

- The **shoulder belt** should rest over the shoulder and across the chest, not touching the neck.
- The **lap belt** must fit low and snug across the hips, not the abdomen.
- Their back should be against the vehicle seat, with knees bent comfortably over the edge of the seat and feet flat on the floor.
- They should be able to ride like this for the whole trip.



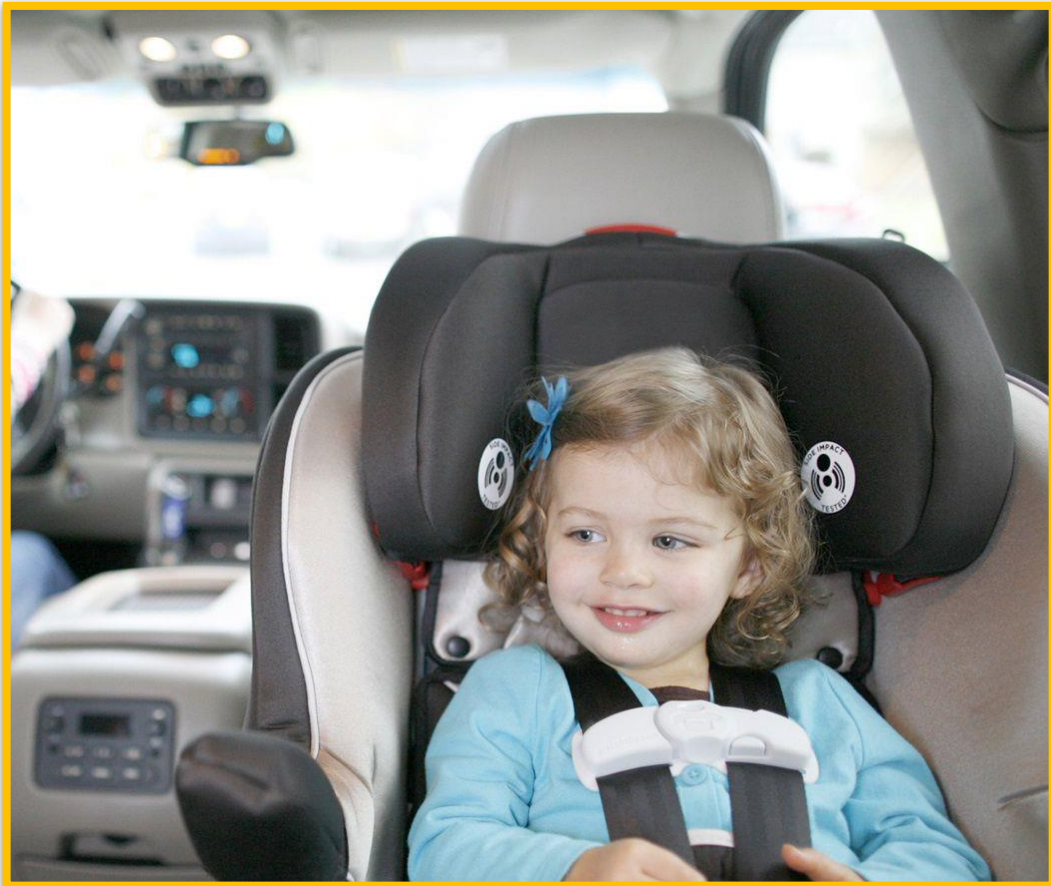
Child Safety Seat Installation



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5-Point Car Seat Safety Check



- **SELECTION** – choose the right seat for child's height, weight, and development.
- **DIRECTION** – turn the seat rear-facing or forward-facing in the vehicle.
- **LOCATION** – identify the best place in the vehicle for the child.
- **INSTALLATION** – install the seat correctly in the vehicle.
- **HARNESSING OR SEAT BELT FIT** – harness or fit seat belt correctly over the child's body.

Installation Using LATCH*

English



Click the link to watch the video: [Using LATCH to Install Car Seats and Booster Seats \(Children's Hospital of Philadelphia\)](#)

*LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children.

Air Bag Safety

English



Click the link to watch the video: [Air Bag Safety for Infants, Toddlers and Children \(Children's Hospital of Philadelphia\)](#)

Air Bag Recalls

Always check for air bag recalls on your vehicle to protect yourself and other passengers.

- Sign up for recall alerts for your vehicle: [Email Alerts | Safercar | National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) \(dot.gov\)](#).
- Check to see if your vehicle is recalled: [Check for Recalls: Vehicle, Car Seat, Tire, Equipment | NHTSA](#).
- Check To Protect [Vehicle Recall Check by VIN or License Plate | Check to Protect](#).

Installation Reminders

- Always review car seat and vehicle manuals for proper use and installation.
- Use only the seat belt **or** LATCH, not both (unless stated otherwise in the manual).
 - If installing a child safety seat with a seat belt, check that the seat belt is locked and secured.
 - If using LATCH, identify LATCH system in vehicle (varies depending on vehicle) and check the safety seat's labels and manuals for LATCH weight limits.
- Always use a tether anchor with a forward-facing child safety seat when possible.
- Check the car seat moves less than one inch side-to-side or front-to-back once installed.
- Adjust the recline adjuster to the correct angle position for the direction of the seat.

Other Considerations



Secondhand Child Safety Seats

Parents should consider the following before using a secondhand or borrowed child safety seat:

- Is the history of the child safety seat known?
- Does the child safety seat seem to be in good working order?
- Are the seat's labels present?
- Is the child safety seat expired?
- If recalled, has the recall been corrected?
- Has the child safety seat been in a crash?

Counterfeit Child Safety Seats

Counterfeit seats have not been thoroughly designed, manufactured, and tested to meet the federal safety standards. **These seats are not a safe option for transporting a child.** These signs can help determine if a child safety seat is counterfeit:

- Does the child safety seat have all the proper labels?
- Did the seat come with a manual and a registration card?
- Is the seat missing any parts, like the chest clip on the harness?
- Was the owner able to register the seat with the manufacturer?
- Did the price seem "too good to be true"?

It is recommended to purchase a car seat from an authorized retailer.

Crash Replacement Criteria

A car seat should be replaced following a moderate or severe crash for maximum protection. Car seats do not always need to be replaced following a ***minor crash***.

A minor crash is defined when ALL the following applies:

1. The car was driven away from the crash site;
2. The car door closest to the car seat was not damaged.
3. No one in the vehicle suffered injuries;
4. There is no visible damage to the child safety seat; and
5. None of the air bags deployed.

NOTE: Contact your car seat manufacturer for further advice, and your vehicle insurance provider. Some vehicle insurance providers will replace the child safety seat if it is unusable after a crash. The caregiver will need to contact their vehicle insurance provider for further instructions.

Non-Approved Products

- Parents should only use products approved for use by their car seat manufacturer.
- Items such as padding inserts, canopy covers, toys, mirrors, cameras, fans and seat covers are not approved for use by the car seat manufacturer and could change the way the child safety seat performs in a crash or even become a projectile.
- **Approved products are crash tested.**



Hyperthermia

- Texas Law: A person commits an offense if he (or she) intentionally or knowingly leaves a child in a motor vehicle for longer than five minutes knowing the child is:
 - Younger than age 7.
 - Not attended by an individual in the vehicle who is age 14 or older.
- A child's body heats up three to five times faster than an adult's does.
- Cars heat up quickly. In 10 minutes, a car can heat up by 20 degrees.
- Cracking a window or using air conditioning does little to keep the car cool once it is turned off.

Caregiver Hyperthermia Tips

- Teach children not to play in or around vehicles.
- Never leave a child unattended in or around a car. Make a habit of looking in the vehicle's front and back seat before locking the door and walking away.
- Never assume it can't happen to you or your child. A change in routine or busy schedule can cause a caregiver to forget a child is still in the vehicle.
- If a child cannot be found, check the pool and water sources first, then check vehicles, including trunks.
- If you see an unattended child in or around a vehicle, call 911.

Child Passenger Safety Resources

- Safe Kids Worldwide: [Safe Kids Worldwide](#).
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: [NHTSA | National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#).
- Check to Protect (Vehicle Recalls): [Vehicle Recall Check by VIN or License Plate | Check to Protect](#).
- National Child Passenger Safety Board: [Resource Center CPS Board](#).
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [aap.org](#).
- Texas Department of State and Health Services Safe Riders: [dshs.texas.gov/saferiders](#).
- Evenflo: 1 (800) 233-5921: [evenflo.com/pages/contact-us](#).
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Recall Search: [Check for Recalls: Vehicle, Car Seat, Tire, Equipment | NHTSA](#).

Questions?



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Buckle Up At Every Age Ride Safe At Every Stage

For further questions or assistance, please contact:

Safe Riders Program

1-800-252-8255

saferiders@dshs.texas.gov

dshs.texas.gov/saferiders