

Car Seat Checkup



The proper car seat installation can save your child's life.

Car seat regulations are hard to keep up with and manage, especially because they constantly change and differ from state to state. Keep this checklist, compiled with the help of Shane Bland, certified car seat safety technician through Safe Kids Worldwide Westchester, and Greg Durocher, child passenger safety technician instructor at Safe Ride 4 Kids, wherever you will remember to reference it for properly installing and using a car seat.

- Read the owner's manual.** This should be the first thing you do after purchasing the car seat. If you have questions the manual doesn't answer, check the FAQ section on the manufacturer's website.
- Check the expiration date,** especially if the car seat is a hand-me-down. The manufacturer lists this date, typically 6 years from when it was made, on the car seat.



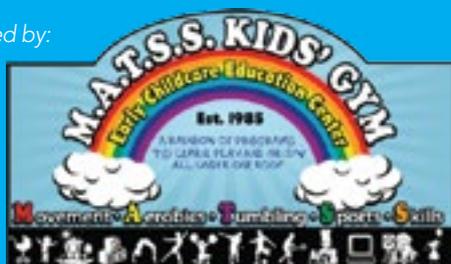
- Look for recalls** on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website, nhtsa.gov.
- Find the best location.** The safest spot is in the middle rear seat, which protects the child from impact on any point on the car. If you have two car seats, put the youngest child closest to the driver.
- Determine the direction your child should face.** Safe Kids Worldwide recommends children stay rear facing as long as is comfortable. A rear-facing car seat protects the child in the case of a front-facing crash, and prevents whiplash in the case of a rear-end accident.
- Check the car seat security after installing.** Shake the seat with the strength of a firm handshake; the seat should move no more than 1 inch (measured at the seatbelt buckle) in each direction.
- Ensure your child is buckled in properly.** In a rear-facing, five-point harness car seat, the hole

where the strap goes through on the back of the car seat should be at or below the child's shoulders. This prevents the child from sliding up the back of the car seat in the event of a forward crash. In a forward-facing, five-point harness car seat, the strap should go through a hole that is at or above the child's shoulders. This ensures your child will lean into the seatbelt in the event of a forward crash rather than having the seatbelt compress his spine.

Do you think your child is big enough to safely stop using a booster seat? Use the NHSTA's five-point test to decide:

- Make sure your child's back is touching the back of the seat.
- Do her feet touch the floor?
- Do his knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
- Does the seatbelt cross her shoulder and the lap belt sit low on her hips?
- Can he stay seated, comfortably, this way for the duration of the trip?

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