

# Car Safety

## *Air bags, car seats, and your child's safety*

## You & Your Child

Seatbelts and air bags help prevent injuries to drivers and passengers in cars involved in accidents. They work well enough that the government insists that they are included as mandatory equipment on new cars. And there are laws that require motorists to use them.

When children are riding in a car, they must be secured in a car seat or strapped in with a seatbelt at all times.

But car safety equipment must be used properly. Infants and young children need to use a car seat, properly secured, instead of seatbelts. Older children should use booster seats or seatbelts.

Children under the age of 12 should not sit where an air bag can be activated. When triggered, an air bag can result in serious injury to a young child, or death.

It is up to you, as a parent, to make sure your child is using all appropriate car safety equipment, and is using it properly.

### **On Back**

**How to help keep your children safe while riding in the car.**

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For more Parenting Guides and other information, visit the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development on the Internet at [www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides](http://www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides)

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## ***The back seat is the safest place***

The safest place for all infants and children under the age of 12 years is in the back seat.

But remember, even riding in the back seat requires them to be in a car seat, a booster seat, or to be secured by a seat belt.

## **Air Bag Safety**

An air bag can save your life. But air bags and children do not mix. Following a few simple rules will help you keep your child safe in a car with air bags.

Keep infants out of the range of an air bag

Never put an infant under 1 year of age in the front seat of a car with an air bag.

In an accident, air fills the bag in a split-second, and it explodes outward with great force to form a protective cushion for the passenger.

But the force of an air bag can seriously injure or kill a young child, particularly an infant. Several infant deaths have been reportedly caused by air bags.

### ***If your car has an air bag ...***

- Plan ahead so that you do not have to drive with more children than can be safely restrained in the back seat.
- Only children 12 years or older should ride in the front seat of a car that has air bags, and even then, only when necessary.
- If an older child must ride in the front, move the seat back as far as it can go, away from the air bag.

## **Car Seat Safety**

Seat belts do no good if they are not worn. And even the safest car seat can fail your child if it is not used properly. Take a minute to check your child before driving. Follow a few simple safety rules.

### ***Secure all children***

All children must be properly secured in car safety seats, booster seats, or shoulder/lap belts that are correctly matched to their size.

### ***Check the instructions for the car seat***

Follow all instructions. Be sure your child matches the recommended age and weight for the car seat.

### ***Is your child facing the right way?***

Infants ride in rear-facing car seats in the back seat until they are at least 20 pounds and 1 year old.

A child who weighs more than 20 pounds and is older than 1 year faces forward in the car seat, which is still secured in the back seat of the car.

### ***Now, before you start your car ...***

- Check to make sure the car seat harness is snug against your child.
- Make sure the seat belt holding the child safety seat is fastened around the child car seat correctly and is pulled tight.

### ***Older children should use a booster seat***

If your child is at least 40 pounds, he or she has outgrown a child car seat. Use a booster seat, instead.

Check to see if the back seat of your car has seat belts with shoulder straps, or only lap belts. Then, get a booster seat made for that kind of seat belt.

