

Child Restraint in Automobiles

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Consumer Series | Family

by A. Bruce*

The Law

As of August 2010, Colorado expanded its child passenger safety law. All children under the age of 8 must be properly protected in a child safety seat when traveling in a motor vehicle. This change means thousands of 6- and 7-year-olds across the state will have to ride in booster seats. Previously, the law required only 4 and 5-year-olds to be in boosters.

The new regulations are a big step forward in protecting children from serious crash injuries that can occur when seat belts are not designed to protect small bodies. Many parents mistakenly believe that a seat belt is enough to protect their older child in a crash. However, booster seats are a safer option because they lift the child up and position the seat belt safely across their bodies.

Children ages 4 to 7 who use booster seats are 45 percent less likely to be injured in a crash compared to children who are restrained only by seat belts. In Colorado during the years 2004-2008, 28 children ages 4 to 7 were killed in traffic accidents. Twenty of them were improperly restrained, totally unrestrained or using only the vehicle seat belt. A booster seat lifts the child up so that the lap belt rests across hip bones to protect internal organs. It positions the shoulder strap so that it rests across the collar bone instead of on the neck or falling off the shoulder.

To assist parents in deciding the best child safety seat and to ensure it is installed properly, there is a network of more than 140 "fitting stations" across the state. Most of these fit stations offer free assistance for parents, including car seat checks to make sure seats are properly installed. For parents in financial difficulty, some stations provide

car seats at a reduced price. Locations to the nearest fit station can be accessed by going to www.carseatcolorado.com or calling toll free 1-877-LUV-TOTS or 303-239-4625 in metro Denver.

Parents can include booster-age kids in the process by allowing them to help pick out their booster seat and even decorate it. Parents should talk to their children about the importance of proper restraints for their safety and for an improved view out of the car window.

Suggestions for Adults with Child Passengers

- Start off right by using a child restraint when you bring your newborn home from the hospital. Infants enjoy warmth, motion and security. The first ride can provide all of those if you use a rear-facing car seat for your newborn. Some physicians write a formal prescription for a seat restraint for a newborn.
- Tell children what you want them to do rather than what they should not do. For example, say, "I want you to sit quietly while I fasten your belt. If you watch carefully, you will soon be big enough to buckle up yourself."
- If a child is making the first trip in a car seat, make it a happy time. Explain the rules for riding in the car: "Everyone in this car wears a seat belt." Be positive. Say "We are going for a ride and we will have a good time." Point out exciting things the child can now see because of the height of the safety seat. Keep the first ride a short one.
- Children who are not used to riding in a seat restraint will probably resist efforts to secure them. If children struggle, beg or yell, maintain a firm, calm attitude and don't argue. Keep the child in the seat. If you must, stop the automobile in a safe place and give all your attention to calming the child. Distract the child



Quick Facts

- Babies under 1 and less than 20 pounds must ride in a rear-facing car seat and only in the back seat of the vehicle.
- When babies turn 1 and weigh at least 20 pounds, the law gives them the option of using a front-facing car seat.
- Children 4, 5, 6 and 7 must be in a child safety restraint. For most kids, it means a booster seat, but experts recommend children remain in a forward-facing car seat longer if the upper weight limit of the seat allows it (40-50 pounds).
- When a child turns 8, the law allows them to use a vehicle seat belt. Safety experts recommend that kids continue to use a booster seat until they are at least 4' 9" tall.

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with a soft toy, book or doll. Tell the child, “This car does not move until all belts are fastened.” If the child attempts to climb out of the seat or release the buckle, say “No” in a firm, calm voice.

- Remember, praise works better than punishment. Be aware of every positive move the child makes toward using the seat restraint. Praise liberally and immediately. For example, say, “You are sitting so quietly today. Daddy is happy that you can do that. I’ll bet you’re proud that you can do it.” Brag about good behavior to other significant people – and be sure the child hears you do it.
- When riding for long periods, make frequent stops to give children the chance to move about and let off

steam. Even infants like to stretch and kick. Stop only in safe rest areas off the roadway.

- A study of fifth-grade children found that the child’s identification with the parent and the parent’s instruction to the child to “buckle up” are significant factors in the child’s use or nonuse of seat belts. Other studies support the conclusion that the major factor affecting correct use of seat belts by children is use by the parent. Set a good example and see that all riders, adults and children, wear seat belts. You may need to explain to other adults riding in your automobile that your children need to see good examples of seat belt use.

The first rule of child restraint is: Adults who drive with children must use their own seat belts.

Surveys have shown that three out of four safety seats are not used correctly.

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