

Forward-Facing Seats

Forward-facing Basics

Since rear-facing is much safer than forward-facing, we should ask why anyone (besides the driver) would ride forward-facing.

Who sits forward-facing?

Kids who have outgrown their child safety seat's rear-facing height or weight limits.
What seats can be used forward-facing?

There are three types:

1. Convertible seats. These can be used rear-facing OR forward-facing
2. Combination seats. These can be used forward-facing OR as booster seats.
3. Forward-facing only seats. These are useful for kids with special needs or when big kids must ride in vehicles with lap-only belts.

Where does the seat go in the vehicle?

The center of the back seat is the safest place in the car--it is 43% safer than the side seats.
When is my child too big for his forward-facing seat?

There are three things to look for to see if your child is too big for his forward-facing seat:

1. Weight limit. Your child must not exceed the child safety seat's maximum weight limit. Check your instruction manual for your seat's limits. Maximum weight limits range from 40 to 80 pounds.
2. Head Height limit. Your child's ears must not be taller than the top of the child safety seat.
3. Shoulder Height limit. Your child's shoulders must not be higher than the top harness strap slot used for forward-facing 5-point harness mode.

Should I buy a big seat with a high weight limit?

High-weight harness child safety seats are becoming more popular, and for good reason.

1. Safer than booster seats
2. Great for taller toddlers
3. Will last longer than shorter/smaller seats
4. Great for kids with special needs
5. Great for cars with lap-only belts

{mospagebreak title=Who Sits Forward-Facing?}
Who Sits Forward-Facing?

Only children who are too tall or too heavy for their convertible car seat's rear-facing height or weight limits should ride forward-facing. Children who are still within their convertible seat's rear-facing height and weight limits should NOT ride forward-facing.

Please note: It is okay for a child's feet or legs to touch the vehicle seat. This is NOT dangerous, NOT uncomfortable, and DEFINITELY NOT a reason to turn the child around. {mospagebreak title=Types of Forward-Facing Seats}
What types of child safety seats can be used forward-facing?

There are three different types:

Convertible Seats: These convert from rear-facing to forward-facing. Try to buy a tall convertible seat, so that it will last a long time. This is because many children become too tall for their convertible seats--meaning their shoulders become even with the top shoulder harness slot--long before reaching the seat's weight limit and well before they are ready for a booster seat. Selecting a seat with a tall top shoulder strap slot will allow the seat to last longer.

Two convertible seats, placed side by side.

Combination Seats: These are forward-facing seats with a 5 point harness that start at 20-30 pounds and go to 40-65 pounds with the harness. Then you remove the harness and use the seat as a booster until your child is 80 to 100 lbs. When selecting a combination seat, make sure that the top shoulder strap slot is going to be high enough for your child to grow with the seat--on many the top slot is no taller than on the convertible seat.
Forward-Facing Only: These seats fit children at least 1 year old and at least 20-22 pounds. They are particularly useful for children with special needs who need the support of a 5-point harness longer than most children do. They're also useful when an older child must ride in a position with a lap-belt only. {mospagebreak title=Height and Weight Limits}

Height and Weight Limits

Height Limits: The top of the child's ears must be at or below the top of the car seat AND the child's shoulders must be at or below the shoulder strap slot.

Weight Limits: This varies by seat, so check the owner's manual to your car seat.

- Most convertible car seats have a maximum weight limit of 40 pounds.

- If you have a combination seat, please read the fine print carefully! While the seat might accommodate kids from 20-100 pounds, the fine print tells you that the 5-point harness is good from 20-40 pounds and the booster from 40-100 (for example – other seats might have different starting and ending weights).{mospagebreak title=Seat Placement in the Vehicle}

Seat Placement in the Vehicle

Where in the vehicle should a forward-facing child sit?

The center of the back seat is the safest place in the entire vehicle. It's not just safest for kids - it's safest for adults too. Research from real crashes shows that kids sitting in the center are 43% safer than those sitting on the side because you can never take a direct hit in the center.

But there is no LATCH in the center of my vehicle?

Talk about a mixed message! LATCH was designed specifically for child safety seats, yet the safest place for the child safety seat usually doesn't have LATCH. But.... just because there is no LATCH doesn't mean you can't install the child safety seat in the center. You will need to use the vehicle's safety belt to secure the child safety seat in the center. (Just remember, there is almost always a tether anchor in the center - so if you are putting a forward-facing safety seat in the center, use the vehicle's safety belt AND the tether.)

But what if two (or more) people need to ride in the back seat?

Since the center is the safest spot, try to put the person who is least protected in the center. For example, a rear-facing child (even a 4 pound preemie) is 5 times safer than a forward-facing child or adult simply because they are riding rear-facing. So, put the forward-facing child in the center and the rear-facing child on the side to "even things out."

Of course there are times when this may not work. When there is only a lap belt in the center, things get complicated. A child in a booster or an adult should NOT ride with just a lap belt. Therefore it would be safer for the booster child or adult to sit on the side with a shoulder belt.

What if the child safety seat doesn't fit securely in the center?

The most important thing is to use the child safety seat properly. So, if the safety seat doesn't fit securely in the center, install it on the side. Or, buy a different safety seat that will fit securely in the center.

Won't my child fly through the windshield if they sit in the center?

As a parent there are many things to worry about, and many parents worry about this. But as the Car Seat Ladies, we are going to tell you not to worry! If the child safety seat is used properly, you don't have to worry about anyone going through the windshield. A properly used child safety seat is belted tight to the vehicle and the child is strapped tightly in the harness.

The only people who go through the windshield are those who forgot to wear their safety belt or kids who were VERY loose in their harness straps.

{mospagebreak title=Positioning the Child in the Seat}

How should a forward-facing child ride?

1. Recline Angle: It is safest for a forward-facing child to ride fully upright. Many convertible seats have both a recline and upright position. Some child safety seats allow the use of the recline position when the seat is forward-facing, but most require that the seat be fully upright. This is the safest position as well.

2. Shoulder straps: The shoulder straps must come from the back of the child safety seat at or above the child's shoulders. {mospagebreak title=High-Weight Harness Seats}

Child safety seats which allow use of the harness past 40 lbs include:

Convertible Seats:

- Recaro Signo and Como

- Rear-facing from 5 to 35 lbs

- Forward-facing from 22 to 70 lbs

- Child must be within the seat's height limit as well

- Sunshine Kids Radian 65 and Radian 80

- Rear-facing from 5 to 33 lbs rear-facing

- Forward-facing from 22 to 65 or 80 lbs forward-facing

- Child must be within the seat's height limit as well

- These seats fold up to a compact 6 inches high and fit in a travel bag (sold separately) for easy transport....except that they weigh 20 lbs

- Britax Marathon, Decathlon, Boulevard, Boulevard CS and Wizard

- Rear-facing from 5 to 33 or 35 lbs

- Forward-facing from 22 to 65 lbs

- Child must be within the seat's height limit

Combination Seats:

- Graco Nautilus

- Forward-facing with 5 point harness from 20 to 65 lbs
- High-backed booster seat from 30 to 100 lbs
- Backless booster seat from 40 to 100 lbs
- The child must be within the seat's height limit as well

- Britax Frontier

- Forward-facing with 5 point harness from 25 to 80 lbs AND 2 years old.
- High-backed booster from 30 to 100 lbs
- Child must also be within the seat's height limit
- Tether required once child is 65 lbs and using 5-point harness mode

- Safeguard Go

- Forward-facing 5 point harness mode from 22 to 60 lbs for children over 1 year old and who are 34 to 52 inches tall
- Top tether **MUST** be used for 5 point harness mode
- Backless booster seat for children 3 years and older who weigh 40 to 100 lbs
- The child must be within the seat's height limit as well
- Great for travel--seat folds up and fits into travel bag (included) and weighs 10 lbs. Very easy to install.

- Cosco Apex 65, Safety 1st Alpha Elite Apex (or any combination above names as long as it contains the word "Apex")

- Forward-facing 5 point harness mode from 22 to 65 lbs for children over 1 year old
- High-backed booster from 33 to 100 lbs
- Child must also be within the seat's height limit
- Child's ears MUST be below top of vehicle seat/head restraint--which will limit its use in older vehicles with low seat backs

- Nania Airway

- Forward-facing 5 point harness for children at least 1 year of age who weigh 20-55 lbs
- High-back booster for children weighing 33-80 lbs

Forward-facing Only Seats:

- Britax Super Elite/ Husky/ Regent

- Forward-facing 5 point harness seat for children over 1 year old who weigh 20 to 80 lbs
- Tether required for children over 40 lbs

- Fisher Price Futura

- Forward-facing 5 point harness for children over 1 year who weigh 20 to 60 lbs
- Discontinued in 2001

Travel Vests:

- Ride Safer Travel Vest

- Use with lap-only belt for kids 35-60 lbs
 - Use with shoulder/lap belt for kids 35-80 lbs
 - Available in two sizes: 35-60 lbs and 50-80 lbs
-
- Kid Y Harness with Ride Ryte Booster
 - Fits kids 30-80 lbs when used with High-back Ride Ryte booster
 - Fits kids 40-80 lbs when used with backless Ride Ryte booster
 - High-back booster provides whiplash protection in vehicles with low seat backs
 - High-back Ride Ryte booster easily converts to backless booster by simply detaching from base of booster
 - PLEASE NOTE: This child safety restraint has very specific instructions.
 - Ride Ryte MUST be used with Kid Y harness if vehicle seat has lap-only belt.
 - Ride Ryte can be used as a backless booster only if vehicle seat comes up to top of child's ears.
 - Depending on the maximum weight capacity of the tether anchor in your vehicle, you may need to install a heavy-duty tether anchor
-
- Britax Laptop
 - For kids 30-65 lbs
 - Vehicle seat back must be higher than child's ears
 - Discontinued
 - Not a shield booster (which is unsafe and should not be used){mospagebreak title=When To Use A Booster}

When is a child ready to use a booster seat?

A child should not use a booster seat unless he/she is BOTH:

- at least 3-4 years old AND
- at least 40 pounds

Children 3 or 4 years old and 30 to 40 pounds could use a combination seat, which is a seat that starts off as a 5-point harness and then turns into a booster seat once the child is older, heavier, taller, and more mature.

Why shouldn't my 3 year old 30 pound child use a booster?

The 5-point harness of a forward-facing car seat provides the best protection for toddlers, because it not only restricts movement, ensuring that toddlers are in the proper position should a crash occur, but also distributes the crash forces over a larger area of the body when compared to a safety belt and booster seat (two chest straps with the safety seat versus one chest strap with the safety belt.). While many booster seats say that they can be used for children weighing as little as 30 pounds, it is best to wait until the child is at least 40 pounds before using a booster seat.

Do I HAVE to put my child in a booster once he/she is over 40 pounds?

No, many 40 pound children are not mature enough to use a booster seat. If your over 40-pound child leans over to fight with a sibling, picks up dropped toys, hangs out the window, unbuckles his seat belt, etc., then he is NOT READY for a booster seat.

In this case, you should look for a child safety seat that has a 5-point harness and can accommodate a child weighing more than 40 pounds. Some of these seats will turn into boosters later on, once the child is older, heavier, taller, or more mature.