

Airplanes

Why should you use a car seat on an airplane? The airlines don't require that you even buy a seat for a baby under 2!

- Safety
- Professional Recommendations
- Convenience and Comfort

Safety

Here's a typical scenario. You're flying somewhere with your kids. You're already bringing a stroller, a portable crib, suitcases, toys, a diaper bag, and one or more children. Many parents are overwhelmed by the sheer amount of stuff kids require and the first items to get left home are often--you guessed it!-- the car seats. This shouldn't be the case! Kids are vastly better protected if they use a child safety seat on the plane.

Simply put, it's much safer for a child to ride in a child safety seat on an airplane. You aren't allowed to hold a coffee cup during takeoff and landing. All bags must be stowed. This is because anything not secured is liable to fly around if a problem were to occur during takeoff and landing. Children in a car seat are securely fastened to the airplane seat--just like everyone and everything else in the airplane cabin. Doesn't your child deserve the same protection as you--or your suitcase?

What would happen to your child during an aborted takeoff, when you're traveling down the runway at 120 mph and then suddenly stop? What would happen during sudden turbulence? In these situations, you will not be able to hold on to your child tightly enough to keep him safe--the G-forces are simply too strong.

Flight attendant Jan Lohr recounts a flight "when sudden and severe turbulence caused two lap children to be hospitalized. They had sustained injuries when they flew over a dozen rows and landed near a bulkhead. Garment bags in an overhead closet subsequently fell on the infants." While working as a flight attendant, Ms. Lohr survived a plane crash caused by an engine explosion that severed all the hydraulic lines on a flight from Denver to Chicago. She recounts what happened to 22-month old Evan, a lap-child who did not survive the impact, in a statement for the NTSB Advocacy Briefing on Child Restraints on Aircraft.

If you think that a car seat won't protect your child in a crash, think again! Some crashes are survivable. In 2007, a 3-year old was the only survivor of a horrible plane crash - rescuers found her hanging upside down in her car seat in the rubble of the aircraft with only minor injuries.

Professional and Industry Recommendations

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that kids ride in child safety seats on airplanes, based on studies which show preventable deaths and injuries have occurred in lap children:
 "Occupant protection policies for children younger than 2 years on aircraft are inconsistent with all other national policies on safe transportation. Children younger than 2 years are not required to be restrained or secured on aircraft during takeoff, landing, and conditions of turbulence. They are permitted to be held on the lap of an adult. Preventable injuries and deaths have occurred in children younger than 2 years who were unrestrained in aircraft during survivable crashes and conditions of turbulence. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a mandatory federal requirement for

restraint use for children on aircraft. The Academy further recommends that parents ensure that a seat is available for all children during aircraft transport and follow current recommendations for restraint use for all children. Physicians play a significant role in counseling families, advocating for public policy mandates, and encouraging technologic research that will improve protection of children in aircraft."

The FAA also recommends that children sit in child safety seats or devices during air travel:

"Did you know the safest place for your little one during turbulence or an emergency is in an approved child restraint system (CRS) or device, not on your lap?...FAA strongly urges parents and guardians to secure children in an appropriate restraint based on weight and size. Keeping a child in a CRS or device during the flight is the smart and right thing to do."

"Turbulence can happen with little or no warning. And when it does, the safest place for your child is in a CRS (child restraint system), not in an adult's lap. Your arms just aren't capable of holding your child securely, especially when turbulence is unexpected. Keeping your child in a CRS for the duration of the flight is the smart and right thing to do so that everyone in your family arrives safely at your destination." (see the full text)

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"...adults may not be able to maintain a secure hold on a lap-held child during turbulence and survivable accidents. Preventable deaths and injuries have occurred in children under 2 who were unrestrained....For over 30 years, the NTSB has investigated aircraft accidents involving unrestrained children and has issued safety recommendations asking the FAA to require that children under 2 be in an appropriately secured child restraint in their own seat."

Why are you not required to purchase a seat for your child under 2?

The airlines do not require seats for children under two because they're afraid that parents will balk at the cost of three seats and decide to travel by car or train instead. According to the airlines and the FAA, if parents decide to drive, their kids will be more at risk since car travel is statistically more dangerous than air travel. The data used to reach this conclusion are flawed, according to the National Transportation Safety Board, which continues to push for mandatory child restraints for children under two on aircraft. (read more about the NTSB's position)

Convenience and Comfort

Taking along a car seat can seem like a big hassle, but think about it carefully. Do you really want to hold your squirmy 10 month old for 5 hours? We've traveled with kids and car seats and wouldn't do it any other way simply from a comfort and convenience perspective!

- Most kids can't climb out of their car seats, but they can quickly figure out how to open the airplane seat belt and become unrestrained
- Children are more comfortable in the car seat since it's familiar and just their size.
- Kids tend to sleep better in the car seat (we can't stress this one enough!!)
- You don't have to hold a squirmy infant on your lap for hours
- It's easier for parents to get up and stretch or use the lavatory
- You need your car seat to get to and from the airport safely. Kids who don't ride in a car seat on the airplane often don't ride in a car seat on the way to and from the airport, which is exceptionally dangerous (and usually illegal too)
- You don't risk arriving at your destination and finding your rental car seats are the wrong kind of seat for your child, impossible to install, or not actually reserved for you. One parent wrote recently: "Kids did great on the flight. But now starting to turn into trip from hell. Rental car completely out of car seats (despite multiple reassurances that our car seat reservation would be guaranteed). Local Walmart out of car seats. And my daughter is suddenly running a 101 fever. Should have listened to The Car Seat Lady and lugged those monsters on board."

{mospagebreak title=Before You Fly}

Before you fly, know your rights!

Here are some pertinent parts of A Parent's "Car Seat Bill of Rights" for the airplane - also known as the Federal Aviation Administration's Advisory Circular regarding Use of Child Restraint Systems on Aircraft. We suggest that you print the Parent's Bill of Rights and take it with you to the airport in case you need supporting documentation if questioned by an airline employee.

- Use of a Car Seat
- Installing the Car Seat
- Rear-Facing or Forward-Facing?
- Placement on the Plane
- Age and Size Limits
- Booster Seats
- Proving your Car Seat is Certified for Use on Aircraft
- Foreign-made Car Seats

If you purchased a ticket for your child, you are entitled to use your child's car seat.

No airline may "prohibit a child from using an approved CRS (Child Restraint System) when the parent/guardian purchases a ticket for the child." (Section 10-d, page 7)

If your car seat does not fit in your child's assigned airplane seat, the airline has to try to find a different airplane seat that will accommodate the car seat.

"No aircraft operator may prohibit a child from using an approved CRS when the parent/guardian purchases a seat for the child. If an approved CRS, for which a ticket has been purchased, does not fit in a particular seat on the aircraft, the aircraft operator has the responsibility to accommodate the CRS in another seat in the same class of service. The regulations also permit an aircraft operator to use its discretion in identifying the most appropriate forward-facing passenger seat location, considering safe operating practices.

For example:

- (1) A CRS with a base that is too wide to fit properly in a seat with rigid armrests can be moved to a seat with moveable armrests that can be raised to accommodate the CRS.
- (2) An aft-facing CRS that can not be installed properly, because of minimal pitch (distance between seats) between rows, can be moved to a bulkhead seat or a seat in a row with additional pitch." (Section 10-f, page 7)

You may use your car seat rear-facing or forward-facing, depending on your child's age, height and weight and the car seat's height and weight limits.

"CRSs must be installed in forward-facing aircraft seats, in accordance with instructions on the label. This includes placing the CRS in the appropriate forward or aft-facing (rear-facing) direction as indicated on the label for the size of the child." (Section 18, page 11)

This is often misinterpreted by flight attendants - they often understand it to mean that the child's car seat must face forward. But that is not what this statement means! The statement means that the airplane seat must face forward (i.e. face the front of the plane) - so if you somehow are assigned an airplane seat that faces the back of the plane, you can't use that seat for the child's car seat. The direction the child's car seat faces - forward or aft (rear) - is based on the age, weight, and height of the child and whether they are within the parameters for rear-facing or forward facing for that particular car seat.

A car seat may be placed in any airplane seat provided that it does not interfere with passengers evacuating the aircraft in an emergency.

"A window seat is the preferred location; however, other locations may be acceptable, provided the CRS does not block the egress of any passenger, including the child's parent or guardian, to the aisle used to evacuate the aircraft. The regulations...allow aircraft operators to determine the most appropriate passenger seat location for CRSs based on safe operating practices. In making this determination, an aircraft operator should consider the following.

a. Aisle Seats. CRSs should not be placed in an aisle seat because this placement has the highest risk of slowing down the passenger flow rate during an evacuation. For example, a parent or guardian traveling with the child in a CRS may step out into the aisle to release the child from the CRS or the CRS may impede F/As (flight attendants) who may need to climb over the top of aisle seats to get past passengers in the aisle to reach an emergency exit.

b. Rows Forward and Aft of Emergency Exit Rows. Each aircraft operator's specific evacuation procedures should be considered during the development of procedures regarding placement of CRSs on aircraft.

(1) In an evacuation, space has to be rapidly cleared forward or aft of the exit row so that no one would be hurt or trapped if the exit hatch was thrown in this area. A delay may occur as a parent/guardian removes a child from a CRS. If the aircraft operator's crewmember evacuation procedures or instructions to passengers demonstrate the removal and placement of Type III exit hatches ...in the row forward or aft of the emergency exit row, the aircraft operator should restrict the placement of CRSs accordingly.

(2) Installation of a CRS in the row forward of an exit keeps a seat back from breaking over. Aircraft seats are not required to break over, but if an aircraft operates with this feature and evacuation procedures include breaking over seat backs forward of an exit to create space for a crewmember or to create a wider evacuation path for passengers, the aircraft operator should restrict the placement of CRSs accordingly." (Section 18, page 11)

You may use a car seat for a child of any age or size, as long as he/she is within the car seat's height and weight limits.

"Aircraft operators should ensure F/As (flight attendants) are aware that older children (who have not reached their eighteenth birthday) may use a properly approved CRS that is appropriate for that child's size and weight. In this case, the aircraft operator may not prohibit the use of the CRS." (Section 23, page 13)

You may use a combination seat (sometimes also called booster seats--these are seats that start off as 5 point harnesses and then turn into booster seats once your child is old/big/mature enough) on an airplane provided the combination seat is used in the 5 point harness mode and is labeled as certified for use in motor vehicles and aircraft.

"Some manufacturers choose to market and label their approved CRSs with backs as "booster seats."... these "booster seats" fall into two categories, those with and without internal restraints....With internal restraints, solid backs, and the proper labeling, these CRSs marketed as "booster seats" will be labeled as certified for use in motor vehicles and aircraft and may be used for all phases of flight." (Section 16b, pages 10-11)

Basically, traditional boosters can't be used on airplanes since boosters need a shoulder belt - and airplanes just have

lap belts. However, if you are using the 5 point harness mode of a combination seat, you absolutely can use it on the airplane.

Your car seat is considered "certified for use in motor vehicles and aircraft" if it has that phrase on the label on the seat. If the label is unreadable or missing, you may bring along your car seat's owners manual which will contain the same phrase as is on the label. (If you lost your owner's manual you can download one from the manufacturer's website.) A letter or document from the manufacturer is also acceptable.

"When an approved CRS is labeled or marked by the manufacturer, it certifies the CRS meets a set of safety standards....Current operating rules require the CRS used on an aircraft during ground movement, takeoff, and landing must bear labels or markings to indicate to the aircraft operator that the CRS meets safety standards. When a parent/guardian presents an approved CRS for use on aircraft with a worn off or unreadable label, the CRS must be furnished with a letter or document from the manufacturer that specifically ties the CRS (through a detailed description or specific make and model number) to approval for use on aircraft. An owner's manual is also acceptable as proof of safety standards...." (Section 11, page 7)

You can use a foreign-made car seat on an American-based airline provided the car seat has a label or sticker stating that it is approved by the foreign government for use in aircraft.

"The CRS must bear either a label showing approval of a foreign government or a label showing that the CRS was manufactured under the standards of the United Nations." (Section 9b, page 5)

{mospagebreak title=Is Your Car Seat Allowed on the Plane?}

Which car seats can be used on airplanes?

Any car seat that has a label stating it is "certified for use in motor vehicles and aircraft" can be used on an airplane. Foreign seats can be used as long as they are labeled as meeting the standards of a foreign government or the United Nations. This includes infant seats, convertibles, forward-facing seats and combination seats with harnesses (often called "harnessed boosters," these are allowed if used in 5-point harness mode).

Which are best? The narrower the better--car seats less than 16 inches wide will fit on most airplanes. Lighter car seats are also better for air travel, since you'll need to carry them down the aisle and lift them up onto the seat. We've found it easy to travel with the products on this page.

Which car seats cannot be used on airplanes?

Aircraft seats and seat belts are different from motor vehicle seats and seat belts, and crash tests have shown that the car seats listed below may not protect a child in an aircraft seat. Therefore, they are not allowed during take-off and landing, even though some have labels saying they are certified for aircraft use.

- Belt-positioning booster seats. Boosters that use a lap and shoulder belt in a car cannot be used, since in an airplane there is no shoulder belt for upper-body restraint.*

- Travel vests, even if labeled as okay for aircraft. A vest with a rigid plate behind the child allows too much forward movement.

- Belly Belts (a product used to hold a child on an adult's lap, allowed in other countries)

*Note: Combination car seats, sometimes also called boosters, are allowed if used in 5 point harness mode

{mospagebreak title=Our Recommendations for Airplanes}

Our Recommendations for Aiplanes

Here's a bunch of car seats and other products that we think makes traveling on planes easier.

Car Seats

- Graco Snugride 35

Allowed on the plane. Unlike many infant car seats which babies tend to outgrow around 6-9 months of age, these seat will accommodate virtually every baby until 12 months, and most kids until 18 months or older (baby must weigh less than 35 lbs and his head must be at least 1 inch below the top of the car seat).

The Snugride 35 is perfect for parents who do a lot of traveling in vehicles besides their own – taxis, rental cars, airplanes, etc. Since it fits onto most snap n' gos and stroller frames that accommodate infant car seats, it's a breeze to get your child and car seat to where you're going – just wheel them on the stroller (no need to carry the car seat and baby).

- Combi Coccoro

Allowed on the plane. A great seat for babies who have outgrown their infant carrier. This convertible car seat accomodates babies 5 to 33 lbs rear-facing and goes forward-facing to 40 lbs. It weighs only 11 lbs and fits onto the Baby Trend Snap N Go SX stroller (sold separately) for very easy travel (just like an infant carrier). Installs very easily and tightly using the vehicle seat belt, which means it's a terrific option for travel outside of the US.

- Sit n' Stroll

Allowed on the plane. Birth to 30 lbs rear-facing, forward-facing to 40 lbs. The car seat has a stroller built into it.

Please note the following complications associated with the Sit n' Stroll:

- Rear-facing: The Sit n' Stroll typically sits too upright for infants without adequate head control. It's often difficult to install securely enough (so that there's less than 1 inch of movement) as the seat is very wide (it's wider than the LATCH anchors in the vehicle's seat crack).

- Forward-facing: Unlike other forward-facing car seats, where the belt (safety belt or LATCH) that secures the car seat to the vehicle is behind the child's back or just alongside the car seat, the belt path on the Sit N' Stroll is across the child's upper chest. This difference means that the child must be secured in the car seat BEFORE you install the seat in the vehicle AND that the car seat must be uninstalled BEFORE you remove the child from the seat. This isn't a problem if you're going in a taxi or other vehicle that you use for one-way rides (and therefore will not be leaving the car seat in regardless). However, if you're renting/sharing a vehicle and using that same vehicle frequently throughout your trip, installing and uninstalling this car seat for every ride may become cumbersome.

- CARES Harness

Allowed on the Plane, but does NOT work in cars. If you know you'll have a correctly installed, age, height and weight appropriate car seat on the way to and from the airport, and therefore you don't need to bring a car seat with you on your flight, the CARES harness is a great choice. It works with the airplane seat to restrain your child 22 to 44 lbs, and weighs only 1 lb. It's a great way to keep your kid secure without having to bring your car seat with you--but again, its only an option if you KNOW you'll have a car seat getting to and from the airport.

- Safety 1st Go

Not Allowed on the Plane. Are you traveling in the US or Canada with a child who weighs more than 22 pounds? If so, then this extremely portable car seat is a great option. It installs quickly and easily, so when you get to grandma's car or your rental car, you can be on the go in no time with your child extremely safe in a 5 point harness. It also comes with a convenient travel bag and weighs just 10 pounds.

This seat is not FAA approved (because it requires a tether or a shoulder belt, neither of which is found on an airplane), but will easily fit in an overhead bin on the plane. Your child will use the lap belt on the airplane just like an adult (note: the airplane seat belt fits much better than that in a vehicle).

NOTE – You MUST use the tether strap when using this in the car seat mode (kids 22-60 pounds). All Canadian vehicles have had tether anchors factory installed for many years, and factory installed tether anchors in US vehicles have been standard since model year 2000. Most countries outside the US do not have tether anchors in their vehicles – so in those situations you would use this seat as a booster if your child was more than 40 pounds (or a different seat if your child was less than 40 pounds).

- Backless Boosters

Not Allowed on the Plane. These are appropriate for kids AT LEAST 40 pounds (and at least 3 years old). Many boosters have lower weight limits of 30 or 33 pounds – but it is strongly recommended that kids use a 5-point harness car seat until reaching 40 pounds. There are many of these on the market, but the most lightweight and travel friendly is the BubbleBum.

Car Seat Bags, Backpacks, Strollers, Etc.

- TOTEaTOT

This device allows you to strap a car seat onto your rolling suitcase and pull it through the airport or hotel. Your child can sit in the seat while you go.

- GoGoKidz

This product attaches to any Britax convertible car seat (Roundabout, Marathon, Boulevard, Decathlon and Wizard). Instead of carrying your car seat and child through the airport, this product allows you to wheel them. New models for Graco, Evenflo, Cosco, and Eddie Bauer car seats coming soon.

- SafeFit Car Seat Cover'n Carry – can be a backpack or a rolling duffle bag
- Sunshine Kids Easy Tote
- Cheeky Monkey - Pac Back Car Seat Carrier

Entertainment

- Sticker books
- Coloring books (remember to bring crayons)
- Dry-erase marker kids' book
- Magnadoodle/Etch-a-Sketch
- Little People
- Matchbox cars
- Playdough/Crayola Model Magic clay (can not be reused though)
- Small plastic animals
- Wrap new toys like presents – but wrap them multiple times so part of the fun is just unwrapping them.
- Portable DVD player, Ipad touch, Ipad, etc.

{mospagebreak title=Travel Hints}

Hints for easier travel with children

- If the car seat base is wide, raising the armrest will add space.
- To install a forward-facing car seat, recline the aircraft seatback. Put the belt through the car seat belt path. Buckle the belt with the buckle flap toward the airplane seatback, so you will be able to release it. Tighten the seat belt and then raise the seatback.
- If two adults are traveling, one can board first and install the car seat. To reduce restlessness, the child or children can stay in the boarding area with the other adult until the last call.
- Bring a pacifier or a bottle filled with water. Sucking helps keep a baby's ears from hurting during take-off and landing.
- Bring along extra diapers, wipes, and snacks, since you never can anticipate a delay.
- To get to and from the gate easily, some seasoned travelers use a car seat with a stroller base.
- A looped tether strap can be used to haul a seat.
- A car seat bag with carrying straps can be helpful. It can also hold toys and supplies.

{mospagebreak title=In an Emergency}

How to Escape with a Child in an Emergency

Emergency information cards do not include tips on escaping with a baby or young child. The FAA has done escape tests with child dummies.

The easiest and fastest escape method is:

1. Hold your child in front of you with both arms. Protect an infant's head with one hand.
2. If escaping with a child through a window exit, hand your child to another person outside before climbing out yourself.
3. Jump into the emergency slide. Sitting first takes too much time. You could lose your grip on your child. Others behind could push you and make you lose your balance.

