

# Your guide to the car seat stages

Four out of five car seats are improperly installed. Is yours one of them?



Stage 1

## Birth – at least 2 years

Children younger than 2 years old are best protected riding in a rear-facing car seat.

- **Seat type:** infant seat, rear-facing convertible or all-in-one.
- **In vehicle:** rear-facing in the back seat, never in front of an active air bag.
- **Harness straps:** Should come out of the seat at or below the child's shoulder height.
- **Harness clip:** always at armpit level.
- **Straps:** snug with no slack, "pinch test" tight.
- **Angle:** 45-degree recline (Follow the manufacture instructions for how to adjust your base or car seat to achieve the proper recline angle).
- **Installation:** less than one inch of movement when tested at the belt path; use a locked seat belt, built in lock-off, or an approved LATCH position.

### When using a rear-facing convertible seat, be sure to:

1. Use the rear-facing seat belt path.
2. Make sure the seat is in the reclined position.

### When to turn baby forward-facing?

Keep baby rear-facing up to the maximum limits of the convertible car seat. This offers the best protection for the child. Always follow directions from the manufacturer.



Stage 2

## Approximately 2-5 years

All forward facing car seats can be used until a child reaches a minimum of 40 pounds. Many have higher weight limits. Check the forward facing harness weight limits of your seat.

- **Seat type:** forward-facing convertible, all-in-one, or forward-facing only combination.
- **In vehicle:** forward-facing in the back seat.
- **Harness straps:** should come out of the seat at or above the child's shoulder height.
- **Harness clip:** always at armpit level.
- **Straps:** snug with no slack, "pinch test" tight.
- **Installation:** less than one inch of movement at the belt path. Use a locked seat belt, built in lock-off, or an approved LATCH position. Use the tether to secure the top of the car seat to an approved tether anchor point.

### When using a convertible or all-in-one forward facing, be sure to:

1. Follow manufacturer's instructions on the appropriate forward facing position.
2. Use the forward-facing belt path.
3. Use the tether to secure the top of the car seat to an approved tether anchor point.



Stage 3

## Recommended 5 years and 50 pounds – 4'9"

Booster seats help protect children by lifting them so the lap and shoulder seat belt connects with their strong bones. Children should remain in a booster seat until the seat belt fits correctly without it.

- **Seat type:** high-back booster, no-back booster, or forward facing combination/all-in-one in booster mode.
- **In vehicle:** in the back seat.
- **Head support:** child must have head support at least to the top of the ears from the high back booster, the head restraint or the vehicle seat back.
- **Seat belt:** always use a lap and shoulder belt with a booster.

Use the shoulder belt adjuster if the belt touches the child's neck. It should cross the collar bone and not touch the neck or be off the shoulder.



Stage 4

## Minimum 4' 9"

Your child is ready for the lap and shoulder seat belt if you can answer "yes" to each of the following questions.

1. Is your child 4 feet 9 inches?
  2. Does the lap belt sit across the upper thighs, low on the hips?
  3. Does the shoulder belt lie across the collar bone – not touching the neck and not off the shoulder?
  4. When the child's bottom is scooted all the way back against the seat, do his or her knees bend at the edge of the seat?
  5. Can the child stay seated that way for the entire trip?
- **Restraint type:** lap and shoulder seat belt.
  - **Head support:** child must have head support at least to the top of the ears from the head restraint or the vehicle seat back.
  - **In vehicle:** children younger than 13 years old should always ride in the back seat.

## Additional installation tips

- Always check the vehicle owners manual to understand the approved lower anchor seating positions. Many vehicles do not allow lower anchor installation in the center seating position.
- When using the LATCH system, there is a 65 lb weight limit. This includes the weight of the child plus the weight of the car seat. If the lower anchor weight limit applies to your car seat, it will be listed on the installation label.

## Safe support

Instead of purchasing body supports and head cushions that did not come with the car seat, you can roll up receiving blankets and lay them alongside baby (see picture on the front of this flyer). This provides lateral support without interfering with the safety of the harness.

## Don't use non-approved products

Only items approved by the car seat manufacturer are safe to use in the car seat. **Do not use** added accessories such as; toys on the handle, extra padding or harness strap covers. This may introduce slack into the harness in the event of a crash or change how the harness fits the child.

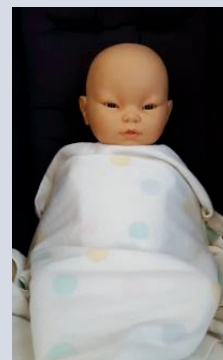


## Strap before you wrap

Buckle baby into the car seat in regular clothing and make sure the harness is snug. Then lay blankets over the top or use an elastic car seat cover that fits around the hard plastic shell of the seat and does not go under baby to keep baby warm in colder weather.



Step one: strap



Step two: wrap

## Is your child riding safe? **We can help.**

The Injury Prevention Program offers free car seat inspections at various locations in the area by nationally certified technicians. A limited number of low cost replacement car seats are available at all locations for those who qualify. Visit [helendevoschildrens.org/injuryprevention](https://helendevoschildrens.org/injuryprevention) for dates, times and locations.

For the greater Grand Rapids area call: **616.391.SAFE (7233)**. For the Lakeshore area call: **616.748.2285**.

If you have questions, email: [injuryprevention@helendevoschildrens.org](mailto:injuryprevention@helendevoschildrens.org)

Corewell Health Grand Rapids Hospitals – Helen DeVos Children's Hospital is not responsible for approving any installation method and will not be held liable for injury or death that may occur from improper installation of the child restraint. This tip sheet is meant to be helpful, but it is ultimately the parent/caregiver's responsibility to ensure proper use of his or her child's car seat by reading the car seat owner's manual and the vehicle owner's manual.