

Birth to Booster Program 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 or rear-facing convertible
- **In vehicle:** rear-facing in the back seat, never in front of an active air bag
- **Harness straps:** at or below shoulder level
- **Harness clip:** always at armpit level
- **Straps:** snug with no slack, "pinch test"
- **Angle:** 45-degree recline (use pool noodles or a tightly rolled towel to achieve the angle)
- **Installation:** less than one inch of movement when tested at the seat belt path; use either a locked seat belt 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 seat harnesses can be used until a child reaches a minimum of 40 pounds. Many harnesses have higher weight limits. Check the label on the seat.

- **Seat type:** forward-facing convertible or forward-facing only combination
- **In vehicle:** forward-facing in the back seat
- **Harness straps:** at or above shoulder level
- **Harness clip:** always at armpit level
- **Straps:** snug with no slack, "pinch test"
- **Angle:** check car seat owner's manual for specific requirements
- **Installation:** less than one inch of movement at the seat belt path. Use either a locked seat belt or an approved LATCH position. Always secure the top of the seat using the tether strap when available. Check manual for weight limits.

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

1. Use the forward-facing seat belt path.
2. Switch the recline adjuster to the upright position.

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 only combination with harness straps removed
- **In vehicle:** in the back seat
- **Head support:** child must have head support at least to the top of the ears from either 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 low across the upper thighs?
 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 either the high back booster, the head restraint or the vehicle seat back.
 - **In vehicle:** children younger than 13 years old should always ride in the back seat

Is your child riding safe?

We can help.

Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Injury Prevention Program offers free car seat inspections at various locations in the area by nationally certified technicians. Visit helendevoschildrens.org/injuryprevention for dates, times and locations.

For the greater Grand Rapids area call: **616.391.7233**

For the Lakeshore area call: **616.748.2285**

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.

In partnership with:

