

THE PICTURE GUIDE TO CAR SEAT SAFETY 2017

I've written a ton about car seat safety. Many people do. This device is the only device you absolutely have to buy for a baby or your child can die. You can rig random things to function as child-proofing at home or pick up things from a garage sale, but when it comes to your car seat, it HAS to be new, it HAS to be good quality, it HAS to be [the right seat](#) for your child and you HAVE to use it right or your child can DIE. I don't know that I can make it any clearer than that.



Now, don't get me wrong — I made my fair share of mistakes, and continued to make some for years, but kept improving. I have no problems with people who intend to learn and do better as they know more. It's admirable, and it's the best anyone can ask for. Whether or not you feel this post is helpful for you, please share it so that maybe it can get to people who can benefit, or more, whose children will benefit, possibly making the difference between life and death.

And without further ado, here's my picture guide to [best convertible car seat](#) safety, in [DOs and DON'Ts](#).



Chest Clip: The name is self-explanatory, so I thought. It belongs between armpit and nipple level. Nowhere else, ever.

Risk: The clip on the belly can damage internal organs and doesn't hold the straps properly over the chest as they're designed to do, meaning your child could be ejected from their seat.



Aftermarket Products: Do not use anything on your seat that did not come with it.

Risk: Aside from voiding your warranty, all manufacturer liability and being denied a replacement seat in a crash, things added can damage the straps or interfere with function of the seat.



Harness Straps: Straps need to be about as tight as you can get them without hurting the child. Try The Pinch Test each time you buckle your kiddo in, just to be sure.

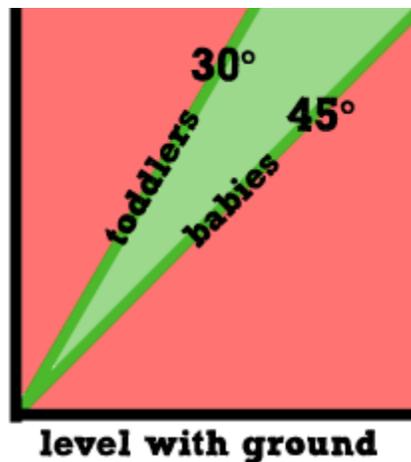
Risk: Loose straps do not hold the child in the seat. They can be partially ejected, which can damage any part of their body that is caught, or totally ejected and fly into the window, seats, another person or out of the car entirely. This is the most common mistake.



Harness Height: For rear-facing, the straps must be AT OR BELOW the shoulders. For forward-facing, AT OR ABOVE. You may put a popsicle stick or butter knife in the slot to test, since sometimes the covers can make it hard to tell where the slot is in the shell.

Risk: When rear-facing, any additional space above the shoulders works similarly to having a loose harness — it's dangerous extra room. Also, when hit head-on (as with 79%) of accidents, you want to prevent the child's body from flying upwards against the back of the seat, but

instead allow the seat to take the impact. Only having the straps below the shoulders keeps the child safely in place.



Angle: The seat needs to be reclined between a 30-45 degree angle. Once children are older and have better neck control, they can be at up to a 30-degree angle. When switching from an infant car seat to a convertible, this change in angle can allow a convertible to take up LESS room than the infant seat, debunking the “I can’t rear-face in my car” myth. If you can fit an infant seat rear facing, a convertible fits too. Risk: Even with the [safest convertible car seat](#), if it is too upright, the body cannot slide along at the intended angle, and in smaller babies without sufficient head control that results in the head dropping down onto the chest, this could restrict breathing.



Bulky Clothes : Children should be dressed in warm-but-thin clothing, then buckled in their seat, and then have warm layers placed on top of them. ([See my video here.](#))

Risk: In an accident, all the air in bulky clothing compresses, like a “Space Saver” bag, leaving the harness incredibly loose and putting the child at risk to be ejected from the seat.



Rear-facing: Children should remain rear-facing in their car seat until they outgrow it by weight or height (less than an inch of headroom from the top of the shell). Two years is the youngest any child should be forward-facing. Children bend their legs, even as they get older.

Risk: Babies and toddlers have weak spines that haven’t fused to protect the spinal cord, and they have proportionately huge heads, and when forward-facing, the weight of the large head pulls on the weak spine, and can separate the skull from the spine, possibly severing the spinal cord (internal decapitation), resulting in paralysis or death. Also, the way the body slides when rear-facing helps the car and car seat absorb the maximum amount of centrifugal force so your

baby's body doesn't have to — children are 75% less likely to die when rear-facing. Everyone is, actually, but it's just not possible for adults. As far as their legs? Not only would leg breaks be preferable to a broken neck, but forward-facing children are more likely to break their legs than rear-facing children.



Harnessing: Safe Kids and the American Academy of Pediatrics, amongst many car seat manufacturers, recommend you keep your child [forward-facing in a 5-point harness](#) until the limits of their seats, which in many newer seats range from 50-85 pounds. 4 years and 40 pounds is the bare minimum, but most children are not mature enough until they're 5-7 years old. Risk: A child who isn't big enough for a [booster](#) can slide out under the belt, called "submarining", can have the belt sit on their belly or neck and cause internal damage to the gut or the esophagus and trachea. A child who will not sit upright, with the belt over their hip bones and over their collar bone, or tries to put their arm over the belt or the shoulder belt behind their back is not mature enough to sit in a booster, and a child who constantly falls asleep in the car should also be in a harness or they can be seriously injured in a crash. There's some debate that heavier (60-70 pound+) children may be safer in a seat belt, but currently the recommendation is still to wait until they outgrow their harness.



Booster Seats: [Children need booster seats](#) until they're 8-12 years old, AND 4'9" and preferably also 80-100 pounds. Seat belts are designed to fit the average adult — not children of any age. The strap cannot touch their necks and the lap belt should be across the hip bones, not the soft belly.

Risk: Children who are not large enough risk many things similar to putting a child in a booster too early — damage to their internal organs, throat and windpipe and the entire body in general. Not to mention, children moved prematurely out of boosters are often quite uncomfortable! Kids must meet the [5-Step-Test](#) before they can go without a booster, something most children don't meet until closer to 10-12.

Conclusion

There's just so much to proper car seat use that I couldn't possibly cover it here, and it's OKAY if you've got something wrong. We all have screwed up at some point. Everyone who helped me with pictures for this post was aware of what I was doing, and some of the "wrong" photos are staged — but some are not. Some are from before moms learned and improved. It's not a problem if you make mistakes... when it becomes a problem is when you'd rather be right than DO right, at the cost of your child's life.