

Car Seats – Is Your Child Ready for the Next Stage?

By Janelle Durham, MSW. Parent Educator for Bellevue College. www.gooddayswithkids.com



Motor vehicle accidents are a major cause of child injury, and the second leading cause of child death in the U.S. Proper use of the proper car seat can hugely reduce the risks for your child. There are four stages of car safety restraints. To choose the right level for your child, it is more important to consider their height and weight than their age. **To maximize safety, keep your child in each level of seat as long as possible**, until they reach the maximum height and weight for that seat. Each stage provides less protection. Don't move your child to the next stage until you have to.

Rear-Facing. (Birth to age 2 or beyond) Infant Seat. Weight up to 22 – 35 pounds and height up to 29 – 32 inches, depending on the seat. Convertible Seat. Weight up to 45 pounds, maximum height 40 inches for rear-facing. The American Academy of Pediatrics says all infants and toddlers should ride rear-facing until they are 2 years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the manufacturer of their seat. Riding rear-facing reduces the risk of severe injury by 75%.

Forward-Facing Car Seat with a 5-point Harness. (Age 2 – 7 or beyond)
Maximum weight 35 – 70 pounds. Maximum height up to 50 inches.

Booster Seat. (Age 4 – 8 or beyond) Up to 100 – 120 pounds. From 34 – 63".
Washington State requires that children use a child safety seat until they are at least 8 years old or taller than 4'9", whichever comes first.

Seat Belt. (Age 8 – 12) If your child is 8 – 12 years old or at least 4 feet 9 inches tall, AND you can answer yes to these questions, then they're ready to move out of a booster seat.

- When the child is sitting all the way back against the vehicle seat, do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
- Does the lap belt stay on the top of the child's thighs, not up on their belly?
- Is the shoulder belt center on the child's chest and shoulder?
- Can the child stay seated this way for the whole trip? Without putting the shoulder part of their seat belt under their arm or behind their back?

Front Seat. By Washington law, all children should ride in the back seat of the car until age 13. (Exceptions for: pickup trucks or sports cars with no back seat)

More info: www.800bucklup.org; www.safercar.gov/parents; www.healthychildren.org;
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/03/21/peds.2011-0213.full.pdf+html>