



Making a Difference in Child Passenger Safety: Childcare Professionals

Childcare professionals need to know what to look for, how to identify what they see, and what needs to be done every time they transport children in a motor vehicle. On average, four children age 14 and younger are killed and more than 490 are injured each day in motor vehicle crashes in the United States.¹

Childcare professionals can apply some basic questions to the important issues of increasing the correct use of child seats. These questions will help assure the safe transport of children and that all laws are being followed.

What can I see? Why is it important?

Regardless of how much or how little Child Passenger Safety training you have taken, there are a number of dangerous behaviors and situations that can be identified anytime you are transporting children in a car or see children being transported:

- Are all children sitting in the back seat? If there are more children than seating positions in the back seat, who is up front and how is that child restrained?
- At a minimum, look for GROSS MISUSE OR NON-USE. Non-use of restraints is the worst type of misuse. Gross misuse may include:
 - No safety belt or LATCH attachments anchoring the child restraint.²
 - No harness securing the child in the child restraint.
 - A rear-facing infant in the front seat with an active passenger air bag.
 - An infant or toddler less than one-year-old facing forward.

There also are some basic questions you can ask yourself to make sure children are properly restrained:

Is there a baby or small child in the car?

Does the child restraint law cover that child? Become more familiar with your state's child passenger safety laws.³ Legal requirements can be an effective "educational" tool in some situations.

Is the child in the right type of child restraint?

NHTSA advises parents and caregivers to keep children in each child restraint type, including rear-facing, forward-facing and booster seats, for as long as possible before moving them up to the next type of seat. More information on car seat recommendations can be found on Page 4.

Is the child restraint facing forward or rearward?

This is determined by the size and age of the child. Infants and toddlers should be kept in rear-facing seats for as long as possible, as the seat is designed to absorb the crash forces.

Can I see a child restraint harness system?

The harness holds the child to the restraint. If it's not used, then there is no restraint. If it's too loose, there's a danger the child could be ejected.

Can I see the vehicle's safety belt? Is it anchoring the child restraint?

A child restraint that's not anchored to the car is dangerous to the child and other passengers. The car's safety belt or LATCH system should be routed correctly and tightened down to reduce movement of the child restraint. There should be no more than one inch of movement forward-and-back or side-to-side regardless of which system is used.

Is there a child using a safety belt who is too small to use it properly?

A child should remain in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly, the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snug across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face.

School Buses and 15-Passenger Vans

“We have seat belts in passenger cars, so why don't we have them on school buses?” is a common question asked by many parents. The basic answer is that school buses are different from passenger cars by design and use different kinds of safety systems that work extremely well—so well that school bus transportation is the safest form of ground transportation. School buses are nearly 8 times safer than passenger vehicles and getting to and from the bus is more dangerous than actually riding the bus.⁴

There are a number of factors that make school buses so safe:

- Buses are larger and heavier than most other vehicles and passengers sit high above the impact zone.
- The crash forces are distributed throughout the vehicle differently and are also experienced by the occupants differently.
- School buses have special equipment that is bus-specific, such as stop arms, warning lights, roof hatches, crossing arms and more.

Whenever pre-school age children are transported in school buses, NHTSA recommends that each child should be transported in a child restraint suitable for the child's weight and age, with the restraint being properly secured to the seat.

15-passenger vans are required to have seat belts in all seating positions, but older models of vans may have lap-belt-only seat belts in all rear seats. Federal regulations do not prohibit the use of these vans by schools, but NHTSA recommends that children be transported in school buses rather than vans. ■

What should I do?

Childcare professionals need to know what to look for and how to identify what they see, whether it is in the carpool drop-off or pick-up line or during facility sponsored transportation.

At a minimum, if the childcare professional sees a child in the vehicle, he or she should look for the gross misuse or non-use of child restraints. Then, at that point, you should take appropriate action to protect the child if misuse or non-use is observed. You can educate the driver about proper use or direct them to an inspection station.⁵ Also, warn the parent or caregiver about possible serious injury or death to the child and about the law and the possibility of a citation.

Childcare professionals often play a role in the transporting of children and assume a tremendous amount of responsibility to protect the children's health and safety when providing transportation services, whether it is for routine transportation to and from the center or for field trips.

There are a number of formal ways a childcare facility can assure child passenger safety:

- Develop a written transportation policy, in accordance with state laws.
- Provide guidelines and recommended practices based on the availability of child restraints and types of vehicles used.
- Accurately and consistently document the number of children transported by the childcare provider in a given time. Reports should include children's ages, types of restraints and vehicles used and the special needs of individual children.

Also, the most effective enforcement of occupant restraint laws is done with community support, and enforcement agencies are more likely to actively enforce child passenger safety and seat belt laws if the public demands and supports it. Expressions of support from childcare professionals and other educators to local government and enforcement officials can go a long way toward helping to assure that these laws are actively enforced. ■

True/False Quiz

1. A childcare facility should develop a written transportation policy. **TRUE** or **FALSE**
2. Non-use of restraints is the worst type of misuse. **TRUE** or **FALSE**
3. Infant seats should face forward. **TRUE** or **FALSE**
4. 15-passenger vans are the safest way to transport children. **TRUE** or **FALSE**
5. At a minimum, you should look for gross misuse or non-use of child restraints. **TRUE** or **FALSE**

Answer Key: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True

Car Seat Recommendations for Children



- Select a car seat based on your child's age and size, and choose a seat that fits in your vehicle and use it every time.
- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer's instructions; read the vehicle owner's manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or LATCH system; and check height and weight limits.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer's height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.

AGE



Birth – 12 months

Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.



1 – 3 years

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.



4 – 7 years

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.



8 – 12 years

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snug across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.

DESCRIPTION (RESTRAINT TYPE)



A REAR-FACING CAR SEAT is the best seat for your young child to use. It has a harness and in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.



A FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT has a harness and tether that limits your child's forward movement during a crash.



A BOOSTER SEAT positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child's body.



A SEAT BELT should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain the child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck.



www.facebook.com/childpassengersafety



<http://twitter.com/childseatsafety>

March 21, 2011

Additional Information and References

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 2009 Children Traffic Safety Fact Sheet. Available at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811387.pdf>
- For more information on LATCH, visit <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/LATCH>
- To find your state's laws, visit http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/childsafety_laws.html
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Child Safety Research in School Buses. Available at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/esv/esv19/05-0325-W.pdf>
- To find your nearest inspection station, visit <http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm>