



Trends in Passenger Safety for Children Ages 0-13

6th Annual Data Release

A Social Media Toolkit to Generate Year-Round Awareness

In partnership with



Free materials to generate awareness about child passenger safety in
your community for Child Passenger Safety Week and beyond.

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Findings at a Glance

Background

Car crashes are a leading safety issue facing children. More than 127,000 children were injured in car crashes in 2024, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). In recognition of National Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Week (Sept. 20-26, 2026), AAA and the National Safety Council (NSC) are releasing new research that sheds light on the extent to which parents and caregivers in the U.S. are informed about car seat installation and use.

According to the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF) database, nearly three-fourths (73.7%) of all car seats checked by Child Passenger Safety Technicians in 2025 were incorrectly installed and used. Yet, a general consumer survey revealed only 1 in 5 parents and caregivers seek expert help installing a car seat or securing a child in a car seat.

Data from the NDCF database also revealed the following national trends in 2025:

1. There are three common misuses. These include (1) the car seat installation is too loose, (2) not using the tether when installing a forward-facing car seat with either the lower anchor attachment system or seat belt, and (3) the harness is too loose when securing a child in a car seat.
2. Children are often transitioned out of the appropriate car seats before it is safe to do so. About 19.1% of children are moved to booster seats too soon, and 86.5% of children transitioned to a seat belt too soon.
3. Parents and caregivers are good at getting expert help when children are less than one-year old or before the child is born, but they are not always coming back for adjustments as the child gets older or they change car seats/add children to the vehicle. Child Passenger Safety Technicians check about five times the amount of rear-facing car seats than they do forward-facing car seats, and 83.8% of forward-facing seats were not used correctly.
4. Parents and caregivers who make an error are more likely to make other errors. These errors can compound each other from a safety perspective. On seats with at least one harness-related error, nearly 80% also have at least one installation-related error as well (tether, seat belt, and/or lower anchor error).

Methodology

In partnership with AAA and National Safety Council, Westat researchers examined data submitted to the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF), a national database of detailed information on car seat inspections performed by certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs). The final dataset used for analysis represents all 50 states and includes 102,592 car seat inspections performed between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025. In addition, AAA and NSC commissioned Ipsos, the world's largest insights and analytics company, to collect information on the general awareness and opinions of U.S. adults about child passenger safety. Ipsos used KnowledgePanel to survey 1,500 total respondents, with an oversample of 500 parents with children aged 17 or younger living in the home between July 30, 2021, and Aug. 2, 2021. Responses were received from 805 parents, including 509 parents with children younger than ten years of age.



Check for Common Child Passenger Safety Misuses

The list below highlights common child passenger safety misuses observed across the U.S. and what parents and caregivers should check. These misuses are observed nationwide, and the most common ones vary by state. See the Appendix for state-specific data on the top misuses, as well as the percentages of children who transitioned to booster seats or adult seat belts too soon.

Parents and caregivers should check that...

- 1 A seat belt fits properly when children are riding in a booster seat or seat belt alone.
- 2 The car seat harness is snug enough on the child.
- 3 The car seat is installed tight enough on vehicle seats when using a seat belt for installation.
- 4 The car seat is installed tight enough on vehicle seats when using the lower anchor attachment system for installation.
- 5 The tether is used whenever possible on forward-facing car seats (and as instructed by both the car seat and vehicle manufacturers).
- 6 The lower anchor attachment system and seat belt are not used together to install a car seat (unless both the car seat manufacturer and the vehicle manufacturer approve the use of both systems for installation).

Posting Guidelines

Overview

The following pages include sample social media posts featuring videos, motion graphics, and suggested captions that can be used year-round to increase awareness about securing children correctly during motor vehicle travel. An editorial calendar with recommendations for Child Passenger Safety Week is also included. All videos and motion graphics are available in the accompanying toolkit folder.

The toolkit also includes:

- Tagging instructions
- Recommended hashtags
- Optional resources
- State-level data to help you localize social media posts (see Appendix).

Tagging

To expand your post's visibility, you are encouraged to tag the National Safety Council and AAA.

Platform	AAA	National Safety Council
X	@AAAnews	@NSCsafety
Facebook	AAA	National Safety Council
Instagram	@AAA_National	@nationalsafetycouncil
LinkedIn	AAA	National Safety Council



Hashtags

To expand your post's visibility, you may want to tag the National Safety Council and AAA.

- #ChildPassengerSafety
- #NSC
- #CarSeat
- #CpsBoard
- #AAA
- #TheRightSeat
- #safety
- #KeepEachOtherSafe

What Do These Icons Mean?

These icons (1-6) connect educational resources with common misuses detailed on page 3.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Optional Resources

Customize your social media post to reflect your community and local car seat inspection resources. If inspection services are unavailable, consider sharing the educational resources below.

Resource	Description
https://www.safety-connection.org/caregiver	A free resource to schedule an in-person or virtual car seat inspection with a Child Passenger Safety Technician.
www.cpsboard.org/3D-images	Interactive, 3D car seat education resource that allows you to review the parts of car seats and high-back booster seats.
www.cpsboard.org/trainings/car-seat-basics	Car Seat Basics is a free introductory child passenger safety training, available in English and Spanish, that takes about 60 minutes to complete.
1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q86DcpYGBwU	An instructional video that shows the proper fit for booster seats and seat belts.
1 https://carseateducation.org/product/booster-seats-and-seat-belts-basics-mini-course-2	Booster Seats and Seat Belts Basics is a free online training available on the national Child Passenger Safety Learning Portal, an NSC program. This course takes about 30 minutes to complete.
www.aaa.com/carseats	A resource to schedule in-person inspections at a AAA location. (Note: only accessible in Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, Utah and Wyoming)
https://mwg.aaa.com/automotive/car-seat-inspections/safety-check-up	This free, online check-up shares car seat safety best practices in vehicles, including considerations for the child's age, weight, height, and developmental level, car seat manufacturer instructions, and state laws. (Note: only accessible in Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, Utah and Wyoming)
https://www.nhtsa.gov/vehicle-safety/car-seats-and-booster-seats#installation-help-inspection	A resource to locate a car seat inspection station by zip code.

Social Media Posts

Post	Asset	Caption
Post A: Harnessing 101 2		Is your child harnessed in their car seat correctly? Data from AAA and the National Digital Car Seat Check Form, an NSC program, reveals the need for parents and caregivers to check the harness, and we want to help you get started: 👁️ Watch this short video 🔍 Know what to look for ✅ Make adjustments as needed 📅 Schedule a car seat check today: [insert resource]
Post B: Tether Use on Forward-Facing Seats 5		The tether is an important — and often overlooked — step to installing a child's forward-facing car seat. Learn more about what it is: 👁️ Watch this short video 🔍 Know what to look for ✅ Make adjustments as needed 📅 Schedule a car seat check today: [insert resource]
Post C: Installed Tight Enough 3 4		Data from AAA and the National Digital Car Seat Check Form, an NSC program, reveals the need for parents and caregivers to check that their car seat is installed tight enough on the vehicle seat. 👁️ Watch this short video to know what to look for ✅ Learn how to check your child's car seat for a secure install 📅 Schedule a car seat check today: [insert resource]

Social Media Posts

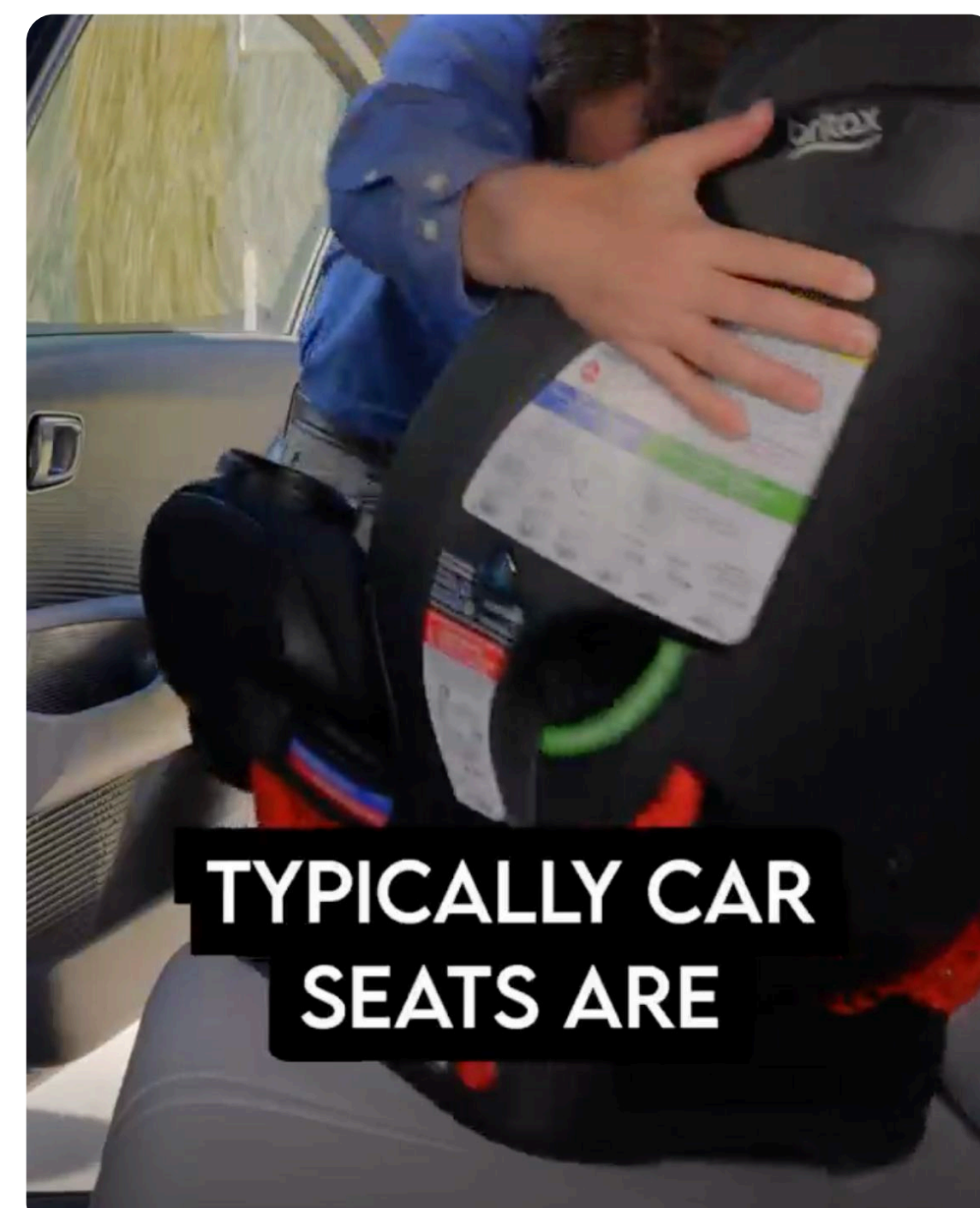
Post

Asset

Caption

Post D:
Installation Method
Review

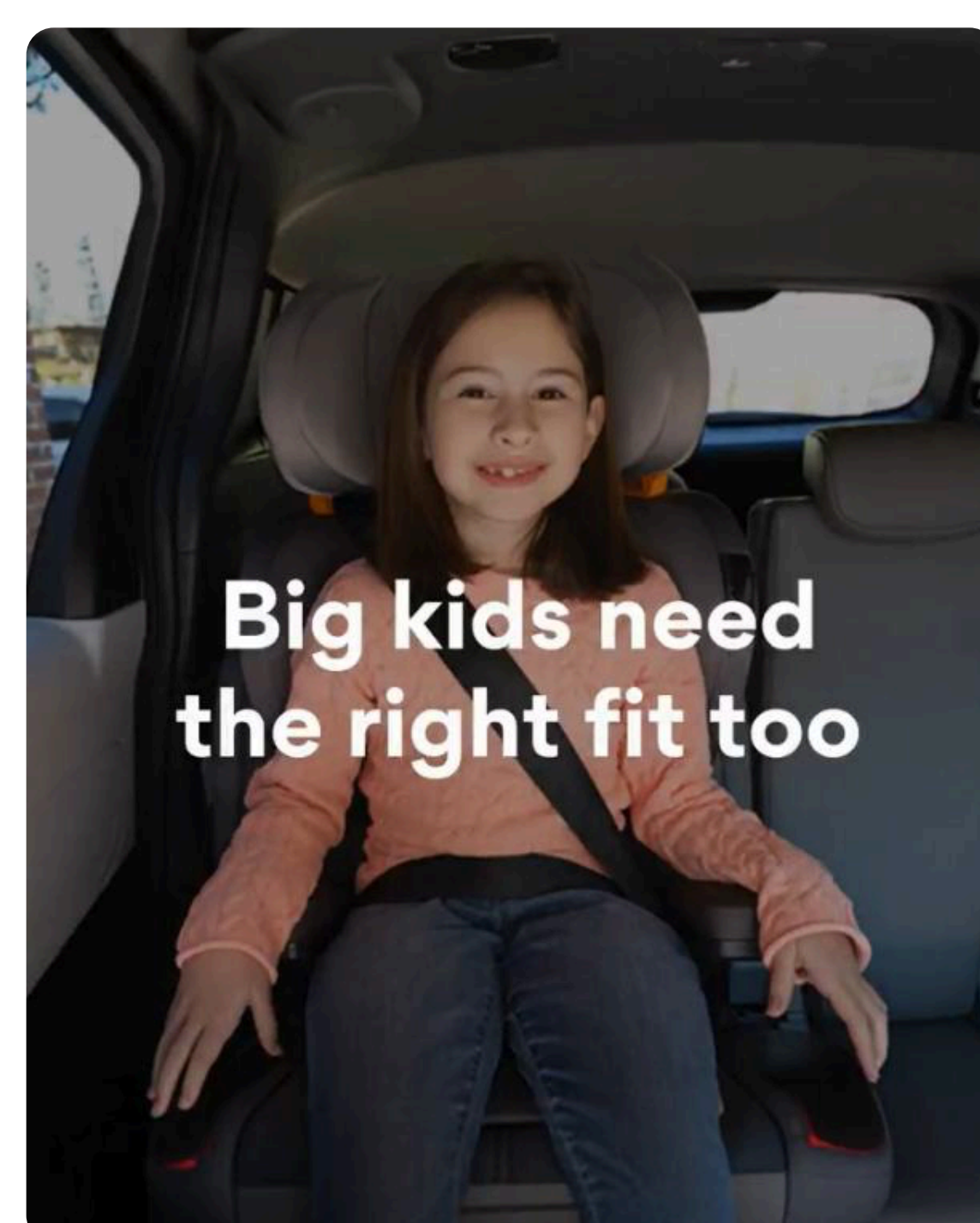
6



Did you know car seats are typically installed using either the lower anchor attachment system or the seat belt? But can you use both?

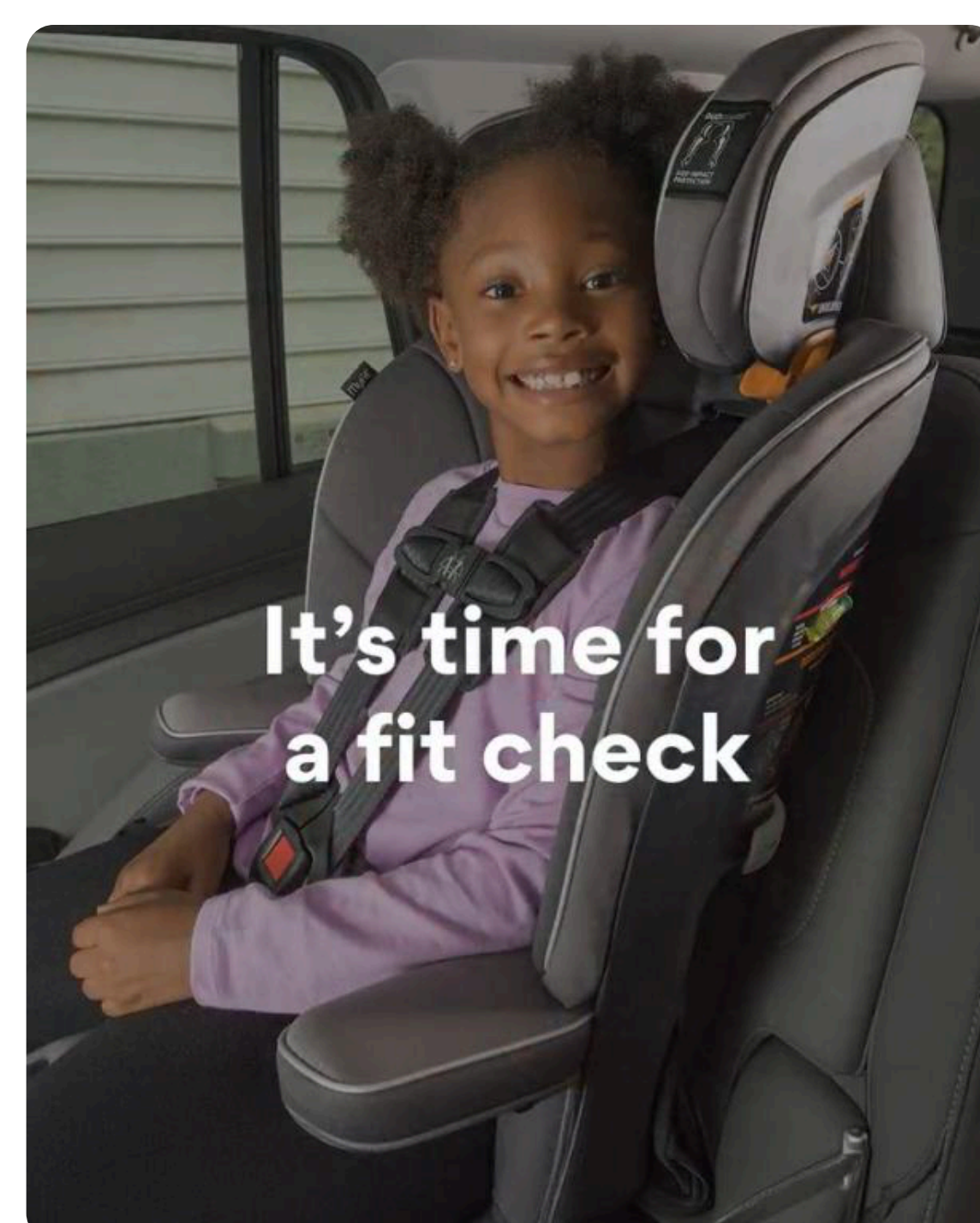
- 👤 Watch this short video to know what to look for
- ✅ Learn how to check your child's car seat for a secure install
- 📅 Schedule a car seat check today: [\[insert resource\]](#)

Post E:
Seat Belt Fit



Seat belt fit can be tricky — and fit isn't always the same from one vehicle to the next. Whether a child is in a booster seat or using the seat belt alone, you are encouraged to schedule an inspection with a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. Visit [\[insert resource\]](#) to learn more.

Post F:
It's time for a fit
check



Data from AAA and the National Digital Car Seat Check Form, an NSC program, reveals what Child Passenger Safety Technicians saw when conducting car seat checks in 2025. Get a closer look below at the misuse they observed, and remember to schedule an inspection with a certified Technician in your area.

[\[insert resource\]](#)

- 69.6% of rear-facing car seats were not used correctly
- 83.3% of forward-facing car seats were not used correctly
- 68.8% of booster seats were not used correctly
- 19.1% transitioned to a booster seat too soon
- 86.5% transitioned to a seat belt too soon

[\[Make this caption your own by swapping in data that resonates most — national trends, state-level stats, or local insights\]](#)



Suggested Posting Schedule

Looking for inspiration? We mapped out a suggested posting schedule for Child Passenger Safety Week. While designed for the week, all content is evergreen and can be shared throughout the year whenever it best fits your audience.

Sunday, September 20, 2026

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Monday, September 21, 2026

Post A

Tuesday, September 22, 2026

Post B

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Post C

Thursday, September 24, 2026

Post D

Friday, September 25, 2026

Post E

Saturday, September 26, 2026 (National Seat Check Saturday)

Post F



Misuse in the US and by State

Learn about the most common car seat misuses by state, along with the percentage of children who moved to booster seats or adult seat belts too soon. Use the numbered icons within the Key to understand each misuse and what to check. Look for matching icons (1-6) in previous pages to identify educational resources that share how to correct the Top Misuses.

Top Misuses Key

Parents and caregivers should check that...

- 1

A seat belt fits properly when children are riding in a booster seat or seat belt alone.
- 2

The car seat harness is snug enough on the child.
- 3

The car seat is installed tight enough on vehicle seats when using a seat belt for installation.
- 4

The car seat is installed tight enough on vehicle seats when using the lower anchor attachment system for installation.
- 5

The tether is used whenever possible on forward-facing car seats (and as instructed by both the car seat and vehicle manufacturers).
- 6

The lower anchor attachment system and seat belt are not used together to install a car seat (unless both the car seat manufacturer and the vehicle manufacturer approve the use of both systems for installation).

* State Data Unavailable - Default to National Trends on Misuse

** Misuse is less than national trends

** Misuse is more than national trends

National Trends

Country	Top Misuses to Check	Overall Car Seat Misuse	Percent of children who transitioned to a booster seat too soon	Percent of children who transitioned to an adult seat belt too soon
US	2534	73.7%	19.1%	86.5%
State	Top Misuses to Check	Overall Car Seat Misuse**	Percent of children who transitioned to a booster seat too soon**	Percent of children who transitioned to an adult seat belt too soon**
Alabama	123	88.0%	45.8%	87.0%
Alaska	235	75.9%	26.6%	95.1%
Arizona	234	54.3%	29.7%	*
Arkansas	123	89.5%	37.5%	94.7%
California	123	78.2%	24.1%	82.1%
Colorado	126	73.1%	16.4%	88.5%



State	Top Misuses to Check	Overall Car Seat Misuse**	Percent of children who transitioned to a booster seat too soon**	Percent of children who transitioned to an adult seat belt too soon**
Connecticut	2 3 4	69.5%	13.3%	*
Delaware	*	*	*	*
Florida	1 2 3	71.5%	32.0%	94.7%
Georgia	1 2 5	84.3%	34.3%	96.6%
Hawaii	2 3 4	72.5%	14.0%	39.4%
Idaho	1 3 5	75.2%	20.6%	81.7%
Illinois	1 2 3	68.5%	22.8%	95.9%
Indiana	1 2 5	79.5%	29.3%	91.5%
Iowa	2 5 6	75.3%	*	*
Kansas	1 5 6	65.7%	24.6%	95.6%
Kentucky	1 4 6	75.9%	*	93.4%
Louisiana	2 3 5	75.2%	18.1%	*
Maine	2 3 5	78.8%	21.9%	*
Maryland	1 2 3	72.6%	21.5%	82.3%
Massachusetts	1 2 3 5	65.0%	21.9%	93.3%
Michigan	1 3 5	80.8%	28.3%	89.8%
Minnesota	1 2 3	69.4%	13.2%	81.8%
Mississippi	*	*	*	*
Missouri	1 3 5	68.6%	42.0%	97.6%
Montana	1 3 5	72.7%	18.0%	91.7%
Nebraska	1 2 3	76.8%	15.4%	82.6%
Nevada	1 2 3	82.0%	24.0%	89.7%



State	Top Misuses to Check	Overall Car Seat Misuse**	Percent of children who transitioned to a booster seat too soon**	Percent of children who transitioned to an adult seat belt too soon**
New Hampshire	2 4 6	69.8%	20.0%	*
New Jersey	3 5 6	20.2%	*	*
New Mexico	2 3 4	75.2%	12.5%	*
New York	1 2 6	55.7%	22.5%	97.2%
North Carolina	1 2 3	66.2%	23.1%	86.0%
North Dakota	1 2 3	72.5%	16.4%	81.6%
Ohio	1 2 3	74.3%	16.8%	71.1%
Oklahoma	1 2 3	83.6%	25.4%	89.1%
Oregon	2 3 5	73.3%	16.7%	*
Pennsylvania	2 3 4	62.4%	*	*
Rhode Island	5 3 4	69.1%	19.6%	95.1%
South Carolina	1 2 6	60.7%	25.1%	99.2%
South Dakota	*	*	*	*
Tennessee	1 2 3	76.4%	20.1%	90.3%
Texas	1 2 3	72.6%	20.0%	*
Utah	1 2 6	74.1%	27.9%	93.1%
Vermont	1 3 5	70.2%	23.7%	96.6%
Virginia	2 5 6	58.9%	25.8%	*
Washington	1 2 3	72.9%	21.6%	85.0%
West Virginia	*	75.0%	*	*
Wisconsin	1 2 3	76.6%	22.4%	82.7%
Wyoming	1 3 4	72.9%	22.1%	88.6%