

Child Restraint Tips

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How do I choose the right child restraint?

Choose a restraint that's right for the size and weight of your child and that complies with the new child restraint laws. A guide to these laws can be found on our website, www.redcross.org.au/babyseats.

Price is one consideration however you should also check your restraint will be easy to use and also fits properly in your car. A budget restraint may not meet all these criteria and it's common for taller children to outgrow a budget restraint by height well before they reach the maximum weight limits.

Try before you buy! You wouldn't buy a pair of shoes without trying them on so why would you buy a child restraint without seeing it in your car? If your retailer won't do this then find one that does.

Buy your restraints from someone who knows their product. A good retailer will spend time getting to know you, your car and your passengers before recommending the right solution for you. Remember, what's right for you may not be right for someone else. Making the wrong decision may be costly and may not offer your child the best protection.

Aim to have your children in a harnessed capsule/car seat for as long as you can before moving to a booster seat.

Be careful if buying a second hand child restraint unless you know its history. Whilst a child restraint that's been involved in an accident may not show any obvious signs of damage it may not protect your child as it should.

Don't buy or use a child restraint that's 10 years old or more. You should find the date of manufacture stamped or printed on the back of the restraint.

Fitting child seats (ones with built-in harnesses)

Get to know your child seat and make sure you read the instructions.

For all child restraints make sure your car seat belt is correctly pathed through the restraint and firmly tightened. Over-tightening isn't necessary and won't help much. Just make sure it's firm.

For rear facing restraints make sure the top strap is connected to the correct anchor point in your car and that it's just tight enough to remove the slack. If it's too tight it will lift the restraint off the car seat and make it unstable.

For forward facing restraints make sure the top strap is connected to the correct anchor point in your car and that it's tight enough to hold the top of the restraint in place. Get this one as firm as your seatbelt in this position.

If you're not sure that your child seat is correctly fitted, ask a child restraint expert to check it for you.

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Fitting booster seats

Get to know your booster seat and make sure you read the instructions.

As a general rule, foam booster seats don't need to be connected to the anchor point in your car. Because of their weight however, plastic booster seats often do. A booster seat is not 'safer' just because it's anchored to your car.

Extra harnesses with booster seats are often not necessary and can sometimes reduce their effectiveness if used incorrectly. If you have a need to use a harness with a booster seat then it's best to have this professionally demonstrated and fitted.

Don't use a booster seat with just a lap belt in a car. If this is the only seating position available then talk with a child restraint specialist about your options.

When using a booster seat with a lap-sash belt, make sure the sash portion of the belt is deflected away from your child's neck by the booster seat's guides. Also make sure the lap portion of the belt is travelling low across the child's hips or upper thighs. The lap portion of the belt should never pass over your child's stomach.

Day to day usage tips for child seats

Before placing your child into a child seat, make sure it's still properly installed. The seat belts holding your child seat can come loose and they may have been unbuckled my mistake.

Place your child in the seat with the harnesses loosened. Make sure they are also not twisted (twists may harm your child in the event of an accident). Buckle your child in and then tighten the harnesses. This procedure will ensure your harnesses are properly adjusted every time you travel with your child.

When taking your child out of their seat, *loosen the harnesses first* before releasing the buckle. This makes it easier to take your child out of the car, as well as reduces the risk of introducing a twist to the harnesses.

Aim to have the harnesses of your child seat level with or slightly above your child's shoulders.

Make sure your child's eye level is below the top of the child seat.

What if I have further questions?

Please ask a member of the Red Cross team. They are experts when it comes to providing advice on the safest child restraint for your child at every stage of their precious lives.

Don't trust your child's safety to just anyone.

125 Henley Beach Rd, Mile End | Tel 8443 9700 | Monday-Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm



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