

A child safety seat must be used *correctly* to be effective in reducing the risk of injury or death in a crash.

Be sure to follow both the safety seat manufacturer's installation instructions and the instructions in your vehicle owner's manual.

If you have questions, call Community Medical Center's Child Safety Seat Fitting Station at (406) 327-4313 to schedule an appointment to have a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician check your child seat

Missoula's Top 5 Safety Seat Problems

1. The safety seat is not snugly secured to the vehicle seat.

The child safety seat should be so tight in the car that it cannot be pulled more than one inch from side to side, or front to back. Press one knee into the safety seat while you cinch down the car's seat belt tightly!

2. The child is not snugly secured in the safety seat.

The harness straps should be snug, and not allow any slack. It should lie in a relatively straight line without sagging. You should not be able to pinch any slack in the strap between your thumb and forefinger.

- The retainer clip must be positioned at armpit level to hold straps in place.
- Harness straps must be threaded below a child's shoulders for rear-facing seats and above the child's shoulders for forward-facing seats.

Caution: many convertible seats require the harness straps to be threaded through the top slots only when installed forward facing. Be sure to check the manufacturer's instructions.

3. The size of the child and the child seat are not compatible.



INFANTS (under age 1)

All infants must ride rear-facing until they have reached at least 1 year of age and weigh at least 20 pounds and placed in the back seat of the vehicle.

Never place any child safety seat in front of an airbag.

Best practice is to keep a child rear-facing until the child reaches the upper weight limit allowed for the seat the child is using. The rear-facing position provides added protection for the child in the event of a side-impact collision.

Note: there are two types of rear-facing seats: infant-only seats and convertible seats.

- For infants who are not yet one year, but are over 20 pounds, use a convertible seat which has been rated for higher rear-facing weights.
- Some convertible seats can be rear-faced until a child reaches 35 pounds.



TODDLERS (20 – 40 pounds) are best protected in a convertible or combination seat with an internal 5-point harness and placed in the back seat of the vehicle (never in front of an air bag).

YOUNG KIDS (40 – 80 pounds) are best protected in a belt-positioning booster seat with lap and shoulder belts, and in the back seat of a vehicle. The shoulder belt must be positioned across the chest and collarbone (not across the neck), and must never be placed under the arm or behind the back. The lap belt must be placed low and snug across the hips or upper thighs (never across the stomach).



Caution: belt-positioning booster seats must never be used with lap belts only. If you only have lap belts in your back seat, you may:

- Obtain a child safety seat that is specifically designed for kids over 40 pounds when installed with only a lap belt;
- Contact your auto manufacturer about whether shoulder belts can be installed in your back seat, or
- Correctly restrain your child in the front seat, using a booster seat and the lap and shoulder belts. Move the vehicle seat as far back as possible.
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OLDER KIDS (4'9" tall and 8 years old or older) are best protected with lap and shoulder belts in the back seat of a vehicle. The shoulder belt must be positioned across the chest and collarbone (not across the neck), and must never be placed under the arm or behind the back. The lap belt must be placed low and snug across the hips or upper thighs (never across the stomach). If the belts do not fit correctly, the child needs to use a booster seat. **Note: the safety belt fits a child correctly when the child can sit all the way back against the vehicle seat, with knees bent over the edge, and can stay in this position comfortably for the duration of the trip.**

4. Failure to use Top Tethers.

A top tether improves the protection of a child in a forward-facing child seat by minimizing the risk of impacts with the vehicle interior or other passengers, and by preventing excessive forward motion (head excursion) of the child's head. This is especially important in vehicles with reduced rear occupant space or in cases where safety belts do not provide a secure installation. Both the child restraint instructions and the vehicle owner's manual should have specific instructions for use of a tether. A tether kit can be ordered from the vehicle manufacturer.

5. Old seats.

Seats that have been involved in a crash, or are more than 6 years old, are not considered safe. A 2nd hand seat is not reliable. Replace an old seat ASAP.