

Car Safety Basics

- Your child should use a car safety seat (car seat) with a harness for as long as possible, until at least age 4. After age 4, children are often ready to use a booster seat.
- **ALWAYS** follow booster seat and car instructions.
- A lap-shoulder belt **MUST** be used with a booster. **NEVER** use only a lap belt with a booster.
- **If your car has no shoulder belts in the back seat**, see the other side of this sheet.
- Teach your child to buckle up and to pull up on the shoulder belt to make the lap part snug.
- **Use the back seat for all children under age 13.** The back seat is safer, with or without an air bag.
- The center of the back seat is safest. It is farthest away from impact in a crash. However, a child in a booster **MUST** sit where there is a shoulder belt.
- **ALWAYS** use your seat belt. Your child learns from what you do. Make sure **everyone** in the car buckles up.
- Make sure others who drive your child know you expect your child to use a car seat or booster.

Warning: Always secure a booster with a seat belt or LATCH when it is not being used. A loose booster can fly around in a sudden stop or crash and injure others in the car.



For more information, contact
North Dakota Department of Health
Child Passenger Safety Program
1.800.472.2286 (press 1)

Car Seat or Booster—Safer Than Seat Belt Alone

When does a child outgrow a car seat?

Your child should use a car seat with a harness for as long as possible. It will usually give more protection than a booster or a seat belt. Most car seats fit children up to 40 pounds, and many go up to 65 to 90 pounds.

Keep your child in a car seat until:

- the ears are above the top of the child seat, or
- the shoulders are above the top shoulder strap position, or
- the child's weight is at the car seat's upper limit (check the label or instructions).

When your child outgrows a car seat, he or she needs a booster seat.

What is a booster? What does it do?

A booster seat raises the child up to help the lap and shoulder belts fit right (picture, top). Using a booster seat in the rear seat reduces a child's risk of injury by almost 60 percent. A booster also makes the child more comfortable and allows him to see out the window better.

A booster is **NOT** the best choice if:

- The child is over 40 pounds but too short for a booster.
- The child is too wiggly to sit still in a booster.
- There is no shoulder belt to use with the booster.

These children would be much safer riding in a car seat or harness with a higher weight limit. (See Resources.)

Why can't my child use only a seat belt?

Seat belts are made to fit adults. They do not fit most children until at least age 8 to 10. If the lap belt is around or near the child's waist (picture, bottom), it could cause serious injuries in a crash. If the shoulder belt is across the neck, a child might put it behind his back or under his arm. That also could cause very serious injuries.

When will my child be big enough to use a seat belt?

Use the 5-Step Seat Belt Test* to find out. Sit your child in the back seat and put on the seat belt. Check the steps below. If you answer "yes" to **ALL** of these steps, your child is big enough to use a seat belt without a booster.

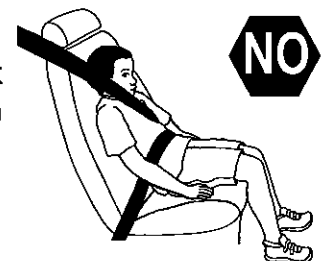
- Can your child sit with a straight back against the vehicle seat back?
- In that position, do his legs bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
- Does the lap belt stay low, touching the thighs (not on the belly)?
- Is the shoulder belt on the center of the shoulder?
- Can your child sit this way without slouching during a long ride?

Note: All cars are not the same, so do this check for any car your child rides in.

* Adapted from SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. 5-Step Test



A booster helps seat belt fit properly. This is a backless booster.



Poor seat belt fit. Child is too small to use it safely.