

Child Car Restraints

Effectiveness of Child Car Restraints

A correctly fitted and used child car restraint, appropriate for the child's age and size, can significantly reduce the risk of serious injury or death in road crashes. The majority of children correctly restrained in a crash suffer only minor or trivial injuries.

Why Children are at Risk

Children incorrectly or inappropriately restrained for their age and size are at greater risk of serious injury in a motor vehicle collision.

- Incorrectly fitted restraints are unlikely to perform as intended in a car crash, increasing the risk of injury to the occupant
- Children using a restraint type intended for an older or larger child too early are also at increased risk of injury

A number of surveys have found that:

- up to 40% of children use restraints inappropriate for their size and age
- many children are moved to a booster seat or adult seatbelt before they are an appropriate size

Child restraint checking services have found that up to 80% of restraints checked have one or more fitting faults.

The main problems identified include:

- Seatbelt undone, twisted or incorrect configuration
- Incorrectly fitted harness, either too loose to restrain a child or not adjusted to the child's shoulder height
- Top tether not attached correctly or not centrally located behind child restraint
- Anchorage assembly faults

Incorrect installation can lead to increased risk of injury and increased severity of injury.

Australian Standards: AS/NZS 1754



All child restraints sold in Australia must meet the strict requirements of the AS/NZS: 1754 covering the materials, design, construction, performance, testing and labelling of child restraints.

Restraints bought in other countries will not meet the Australian Standard - it is illegal to use them in Australia. The symbol to the left certifies that the restraint has been tested to and complies with the Australian Standard.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can my child sit in the front passenger seat?

Research clearly demonstrates that front seat passengers are at significantly greater risk of severe injury and/or death in the event of a crash.

Legally children under 7 years of age are not permitted to occupy the front passenger seat of any vehicle with two or more rows of seats. Children aged 4 – 7 years can only occupy the front passenger seat of any vehicle with two or more rows of seats if all the rear seating positions are occupied by other children less than 7 years of age.

Kidsafe recommends that children under the age of 10-12 do not sit in the front seat, even if they may legally do so.

Safer Seating Position for Children

Kidsafe and other road safety experts recommend the rear centre seating position as the preferred position for children as it provides some additional protection in side impact.

The rear centre seating position may not be able to be used when there is:

- More than one child in car
- No centre anchorage point for child car restraint
- 50/50 split in rear seat back
- Lap only seatbelt in centre
- Vehicle seat contouring issues
- Driver seat conflicts with rearward child restraints

The rear left passenger is the next most suitable option as this is usually the off-road/footpath side of the car.

Seatbelts

- Vehicle occupants must occupy a seat position with a seatbelt.
- Drivers can only carry as many passengers as there are seating position for in the vehicle
- Vehicle occupants cannot share a seat belt.
- Infants and children cannot be carried on another passengers lap when travelling in a motor vehicle.

What about Airbags?

Airbags are designed to protect occupants by reducing impact with the vehicle interior. They deploy at high speed to an adult's chest height.

Kidsafe recommends that:

- Children under 12 years of age do not sit in the front seat, especially where there is an airbag.
- Refer to your vehicle owner's manual for further information on the airbags in your vehicle.



Cargo space or open load

No one is permitted to ride in the cargo space of vehicles. Loose objects become dangerous missiles in a crash, striking with up to 20 times their own force.

- Keep the back shelf under rear window free of loose articles, even tissue boxes.
- Install a cargo barrier/curtain in station wagons, hatchbacks, 4-Wheel drives and panel vans.

Choosing a Child Restraint

When choosing a restraint you need to ensure the restraint suits your child, car and individual needs.

In particular, the size of the seating positions (space between the seatbelt and its connection), and the distance between the back of the front seats and the back of the rear seat (especially for infant seats).

Which restraint do I use?

- An approved child car restraint meets the mandatory requirements of the joint Australian / New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS 1754) for child restraints.
- Restraints complying with AS/NZS 1754 manufactured before 2011 use weight limits as guides for use.
- From 2011 onward, restraints use height to guide transition. Restraints manufactured to this revision of the Standard have shoulder height markers with direction for correct usage.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the use of the restraint that you have.

What is the Law?

Legally the driver of a vehicle is responsible for ensuring all passengers are appropriately restrained regardless of age. The Fine is \$540 for each unrestrained person (which includes a \$40 victims of crime levy). There are specific requirements for passengers up to 7 years of age:

Children under 6 months

- Must use an approved child restraint that is:
 - rearward facing
 - correctly fitted to the vehicle
 - properly adjusted to fit the child's body
- Must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle that has a back row or rows of seats.

A



Best Practice Recommendation:

Keep your baby in a rearward-facing restraint until they reach the child restraint height marker specific to the child restraint in use.

B



Use either

- Infant Carrier (**A**)
- A Rearward Facing (**B**) Convertible Child Restraint

Children 6 months to 4 years of age

- Must use EITHER an approved:
 - rearward-facing child restraint, OR
 - forward facing child restraint with an inbuilt harness
 - correctly fitted to the vehicle
 - properly adjusted to fit the child's body
- Must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle that has a back row or rows of seats.

Best Practice Recommendations:

Only move your child to a forward-facing restraint once they have met the 'MUST BE REAR FACING WHEN SHOULDERS BELOW THIS LINE' height marker, indicating that they have outgrown the rearward facing position.

Use either

- Infant Carrier (**A**)
- A Convertible restraint: Rearward(**B**)/Forward Facing(**C**)
- Fully Harnesses Restraint (**D**) (6 months - 8 years)



Children aged 4 to 7 years of age

- Must use **either** an approved:
 - forward facing child restraint with an inbuilt harness, OR
 - booster seat with a properly fastened and adjusted seatbelt
- Must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle that has a back row or rows of seats unless all the other back seats are occupied by children who are also under 7 years.

Best Practice Recommendations:

Keep children in a booster seat until they reach the maximum height marker. If your child is over 7 years and their shoulders are still below the maximum height marker, keep using it.

Use either

- A Forward-Facing Restraint (**C**)
- A Fully Harnesses Restraint (**D**)
- A Booster seat (**E**)



E

Second Hand Restraints

It is illegal to supply any restraint that does not comply with AS/NZS 1754.

What to look for in 2nd hand restraints:

1. Australian Standard sticker AS/NZS 1754
2. An instruction booklet
3. Complete set of parts
4. Check the history of the restraint – make sure it has not been in a car crash.
5. Check the date of manufacture on the restraint - do not use restraints that are 10 or more years old.
6. Look for signs of damage or stress mark in the restraint shell. These appear like white /grey lines. Do not use if there are a lot of stress lines, splits, cracks or broken areas.
7. Check harnessing and tethering for small frays or tears. A tear or fray as small as 5 mm is a weak point in the harnessing.
8. Check tethering for mould. Little black spots indicate mould is rotting the webbing at these points.

I have a restraint that is ten years old:

Child restraints over ten years of age are not recommended for use because:

- Restraints older than ten years cannot be guaranteed to perform as they were originally intended
- The Australian Standards are regularly reviewed. Older restraints will not meet new improved design features.

After a car crash:

If a restraint has been involved in car collision at speeds of 40 km/ph or more; or a crash where the main body structure of the car is damaged, it should be destroyed even if there is no obvious damage. Find out from your car insurer if they will assist with replacement of car seat in the event of a crash.

Kidsafe NT © 2021

Excerpts may be copied for educational purposes. We acknowledge the valuable support of Kidsafe WA as well as the Northern Territory Government NT Health

Adapted for Kidsafe NT with permission from Kidsafe WA