

**C**ar Seats aren't the most exciting pieces of childhood equipment. They don't keep kids entertained, amused, or even distracted. What they lack in excitement, though, they make up for in security. *The right car seat, used in the right way, greatly increases your child's chance of surviving a car crash.*

In 2019, 183,000 children were injured in traffic crashes, and tragically, 1,053 kids 14 and younger died. In the US, the [leading cause of death](#) for children ages 3-14 is motor vehicle crashes. Frighteningly, almost half of all car seats are installed incorrectly.

### When a LATCH is more than a latch

[LATCH](#) stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. It's an attachment system for child safety seats. Some car seats are held down using the seat belts, while some are held in place by a LATCH. All lower anchors are rated for children that weigh up to 65 pounds. If your child weighs more than that, check the manufacturer's guidelines. If you use a seat belt to install a car seat, make sure that the belt is locked into place. Check your car's owner's manual to learn how to lock your car's belts. As long as they are used correctly, both LATCH systems and seat belts are equally safe, so use whichever one works best for your particular combination of seat and vehicle.

### The magic of the middle

In general, the safest place to ride for all children that are younger than 13 is [the back seat](#), and the safest section of the back seat is the middle. Most crashes are front impact, and the back seat keeps children away from both the impact zone and from airbags that are designed to protect adults. However, if you can't get the seat installed properly in the center back seat, then it's not the best choice. If you get a better installation in the sides of the back seat, choose that. It's more important that the car seat is installed correctly than it is to be in the middle back seat.



## Wait!

I may look snug, but am I safe in all 5 ways?

- Right seat?
- Seat tight?
- Harness height?
- Harness tight?
- Recline right & tether tight?

### Winter car seat tips

Cold weather makes getting everyone situated in their car seats extra challenging. [Here are tips for when the temperature drops:](#)

1. **Don't buckle over bulky winter clothing.** In a crash, puffy coats and snowsuits immediately flatten out from the force of the impact. This leaves the straps loose and unable to keep your child secure. Instead, dress your child in thinner, more fitted, layers, and then cover them with a blanket (or put their jacket on backward) over the harness.

2. **Make sure the harness is tightened.** If you can pinch the strap, then it needs to be tightened so that it will be snug.
3. **If possible, store the car seat in the house.** This keeps it warmer, and it won't zap their body heat when they get buckled in.

### After a crash

Car seats don't automatically have to be replaced after a minor crash. [A crash is said to be a minor one if ALL the following apply:](#)

- ✓ The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site.
- ✓ The vehicle door nearest the car seat was not damaged.
- ✓ None of the passengers in the vehicle sustained any injuries in the crash.
- ✓ If the vehicle has airbags, the airbags did not deploy during the crash; and
- ✓ There is no visible damage to the car seat.

If it's been in a moderate to severe crash, it's time for a new seat, even if it appears to be fine.

For more information, watch [Simple Steps to Child Passenger Safety](#). For further questions, ask SMC's Certified Car Seat Technician, Christine Kunze at 218-387-2330. In Grand Portage, contact Dani Reilly at 218-475-2235.

# Types of Car Seats at a Glance

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics ([www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org))

Age-Group	Type of Seat	General Guidelines
Infants and Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rear-facing-only</li><li>Rear-facing-convertible</li></ul>	<p>All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing seat until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat manufacturer.</p> <p>Most convertible seats have limits that will allow children to ride rear facing for 2 years or more.</p>
Toddlers and Preschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Forward-facing convertible</li><li>Forward-facing with harness</li></ul>	<p>All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing seat until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat manufacturer.</p> <p>Most convertible seats have limits that will allow children to ride rear facing for 2 years or more.</p>
School-age Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Booster</li></ul>	<p>All children whose weight or height exceeds the forward-facing limit for their car safety seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly, typically when they have reached 4 feet 9 inches in height and are 8 to 12 years of age.</p> <p>All children younger than 13 years should ride in the back seat.</p>
Older Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Seat belts</li></ul>	<p>When children are old enough and large enough for the vehicle seat belt to fit them correctly, they should always use lap and shoulder seat belts for the best protection.</p> <p>All children younger than 13 years should ride in the back seat.</p>

## What to know before you buy a car seat:

- Know your child:** Keep track of their height and weight. This information, along with their age, influences when it's time to go up to the next size car seat. This is also impacted by behavioral and/or health issues.
- Know your store:** Some will let you "try before you buy." A test installation allows you to check the fit. This is important, because not every car seat is a good match for all cars. Cushion angle or seat belt placement can make some seats incompatible. Make sure the store will accept returns, in case the fit is wrong.
- Know your car:** In your car's owner's manual, find the section on child safety seats. Read it to familiarize yourself with its specific information on seat belts, LATCH, and seats.



Seats that haven't [been in a serious crash](#) can be handed down, but keep in mind - [car seats do expire](#). They have tough lives: they're made from plastics that degrade when exposed to extremes in temperature and sunshine. They get food and drinks spilled on them, and then they get cleaning agents applied to them. They get taken in and out of cars and sometimes banged around. Some seats will have an expiration date printed on them, but sometimes you'll have to check the car seat manual and then do the math for yourself. Visit [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org) to walk through an interactive decision tree that will help you determine if you can reuse a car seat or not.