

Child Restraint Guidelines

National Guidelines for the Safe Restraint of Children Travelling in Motor Vehicles



Below is a summary of the Guidelines as outlined in the Consumer documents. For a printable copy of the detailed consumer document [click here](#).

Recommendations for keeping children as safe as possible:

These outline the *safest* practices for children travelling in cars. There are also minimum legal requirements that must be followed, and these are listed below the best practice recommendations.

Choosing the safest seating position

Recommendation:

Why this is important:

Children 12 years and under should sit in the rear seat (if there is one). When choosing where to place a child using a child restraint or booster seat in the rear seat, the safest choice of seating position will have as many of the following as possible:

(a) The anchorage points needed for the child restraint (top tether and lower ISOFIX anchorage points if relevant) are available.

(b) The top tether strap (if required) cannot fall into a gap between seat back sections such as if there is a split-folding seat, or off the side of a single seat.

(c) For children in seatbelts or booster seats, the seatbelt buckle is readily accessible.

(d) If lap-sash belts are not available in all seating positions, lap-sash belts should be prioritised for the children in booster seats or seat belts alone.

(e) There are no potential interactions with other child restraints installed, such as a top tether strap from a child seated in front, or space required for other restraints.

(f) Children should preferably be seated in positions that allow entry and exit from the vehicle from the kerb side.

(g) If a booster cushion is used, the centre seat is preferred if a lap-sash seatbelt is available in that position.

(h) The child can be seen by the parent in the front seat.

When choosing the seat position of a child using an adult seat belt in the rear seat, as many of the following points as possible should be followed:

Injury risk to children aged 12 and under is nearly double in the front seat compared to the back seat, irrespective of restraint type.

Choosing the safest seat position in a motor vehicle for a child is not straightforward, particularly when there is more than one child and all their needs

must weighed up to make it as easy as possible for all children to be appropriately and correctly restrained on every trip.

Rearward facing and forward facing restraints (and some booster seats) need to be installed with a top tether, so the location of these needs to be considered when choosing the seat position for these restraints.

The location of lower ISOFIX anchorages in the car needs to be considered when installing a restraint by attaching to them.

The top tether strap needs to be able to securely stop the restraint from moving forward in a crash, so if the strap can fall in a gap or off the side of a seat back, it cannot do its job properly.

In case of an emergency, it's important to be able to quickly release a seat belt. It's also easier to buckle the child correctly if the seat belt buckle is accessible.

For seatbelt and booster users, lap-sash belts are safer than lap-only belts, while forward facing and rearward facing child restraints can be safely installed with lap only belts if there is a suitable top tether anchorage.

Children can be injured by hitting another child's restraint or part of another restraint, so try to arrange children so that one child's restraint does not impinge on another's space. For example, do not seat a child underneath an overhead tether strap from a restraint in the seat in front, and avoid large side wings overlapping a seat belted child's space.

To reduce the risk of either the carer or the child being hit by a passing vehicle, avoid the road-side seating positions if possible, and encourage older children to enter and exit on the kerb side.

Booster cushions have no side impact protection, and the centre seat is further away from where the car might be hit in the side.

While not always possible, particularly for rearward facing restraints, if the driver does not have to turn around to see the child then his or her eyes are not diverted from the road, reducing the chance of a crash.

While being in the centre seat reduces the risk of injury in a side-impact collision, this benefit disappears if there is no lap-sash belt in the centre position. On balance, the presence of a lap-sash belt is more important than the position in the rear seat.

(a) Use a lap-sash seat belt in preference to a lap-only belt

(b) Access to the seat buckle should be easy, if other children using child restraints are in the rear seat

(c) The child should achieve a good seat belt fit (see “5 step test”) in their chosen seat position.

Clear access to the seat belt buckle helps to make it easy for the child to correctly buckle the belt. If there are other child restraints in the car, they can make this difficult, and the positions of restraints may be able to be relocated to minimise the difficulty.

Seat belt fit may vary in different seating positions due to the seat shape and seat belt anchorage locations for middle and outboard seats.

When an airbag is present

Recommendation:

Why this is important:

Rearward facing child restraints should not be used in the front seat when a front passenger airbag is present.

Airbags inflate explosively fast in crashes, to protect adult occupants, and in some cases this has caused fatal head and neck injuries to infants in rear facing child restraints, whose head is immediately in line with the airbag as it deploys.

Forward facing child restraints and booster seats are not recommended in the front seat – especially where an active front passenger airbag is installed. It is not recommended that children 12 years of age and under sit in the front seat of vehicles - especially where there is a front passenger airbag.

Airbags can also increase the risk of injury to children in other restraints, as they are designed for adults. Because most Australian cars (other than those with no rear seat) don't have top tether anchorages in front seats, child restraints usually must be installed in the rear seat

Children 12 years and under in the front seat are at greater risk of injury than adults due to air-bag deployment and, as stated earlier, are at lower risk of serious injury and death in the rear seat than in the front seat with a passenger airbag. Hence the rear seat is the safer option, particularly when there is a front seat passenger airbag.

If it is unavoidable for a child to sit in the front seat with a passenger airbag, the seat should be pushed back as far as possible.

Pushing the seat back as far as possible maximises the distance between the child and the airbag – reducing the interaction between the child and the airbag.

Children should sit upright and should not rest any part of their body on or near where an airbag will inflate.

Airbags inflate explosively fast in crashes, so it is safer for children to not have any body parts directly in their path.

(a) Older children in the front seat, should not rest their feet on the dashboard where the passenger airbag comes out.

In recent years side airbags, including torso airbags and curtain airbags, have become more common. Curtain airbags are likely to provide protection for the heads of children and adults and there are no known dangers from these airbags provided they are not resting their body in the path of the airbag when it is triggered.

(b) For curtain airbags that come out of the roof rail above the side window of a vehicle, children should not rest any part of their body (particularly the head) on the window or sill.

Vehicle manufacturers provide guidance on airbag safety in the user manuals.

(c) For torso airbags that deploy from the side of the seat or the door panel in side crashes, children should not rest any part of their body (particularly the head) on the door.

For further information:

Publications:

NHMRC Best Practice Guidelines for the Safe Restraint for Children Travelling in Motor Vehicles

- [National Child Car Restraint Guidelines - Detailed Consumer Document \(A4 Booklet\)](#)
- [Child Car Restraint Guidelines - A Guide for Parents and Carers \(DL Brochure\)](#)

For information on safely restraining children in cars, contact your local [Kidsafe](#) state/territory office. More details about how these recommendations were developed and the research evidence can be found [here](#)