



# Car Seat Safety Checklist

Your complete guide to keeping your child safe on every ride • [Print & Keep in Car](#)

**⚠ Did You Know?** 59% of car seats are installed incorrectly. A correctly installed car seat reduces injury risk by up to 71% in crashes.

## 1 Before You Install

- Check expiration date** – Found on seat label/bottom (typically 6-10 years)
- Verify not on recall list** – Check at [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls)
- Inspect for damage** – No cracks, fraying straps, or broken parts
- Read BOTH manuals** – Car seat manual AND vehicle owner's manual
- Register your car seat** – With manufacturer for recall notifications

## 2 Rear-Facing Installation (Infants & Toddlers)

### 📍 Positioning

- Seat in **back seat** (NEVER front with airbag)
- Correct **recline angle** (check indicator)
- Approved position per vehicle manual

### 🔒 Securing (Choose ONE)

- LATCH:** Anchors clicked, strap tight
- Seatbelt:** Correct path, locked, tight

### 👉 THE 1-INCH TEST

Grab seat at belt path, move side-to-side and front-to-back. **Must move LESS than 1 inch.** If more, reinstall.

## 3 Forward-Facing Installation (Toddlers & Kids)

### ✅ Prerequisites

- Meets seat's **minimum weight** for FF
- Meets seat's **minimum height** for FF
- Child is **at least 2 years old** (AAP rec.)

### ⚠ Top Tether (REQUIRED)

- Tether anchor located in vehicle
- Tether attached & **tightened**
- Tether strap **NOT twisted**

## 4 Harness & Strap Check – Every Ride!

- Harness height:** RF=at/below shoulders | FF=at/above
- Chest clip** at ARMPIT level (not belly/neck)
- No bulky clothing** under harness

### 👉 PINCH TEST

Try to pinch harness at shoulder. **Can't pinch = correct!**

5 12 Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ✗ Using LATCH and seatbelt together
- ✗ Wrong recline angle for age
- ✗ Forgetting top tether (FF)
- ✗ Exceeding LATCH weight limits
- ✗ Loose install (fails 1-inch test)
- ✗ Chest clip too low or high
- ✗ Twisted harness straps
- ✗ Harness too loose
- ✗ Bulky coat under harness
- ✗ Unapproved aftermarket products
- ✗ Forward-facing too early
- ✗ Wrong harness height

6 Quick Reference: When to Transition

Stage	Direction	Age	When to Transition
Infant Seat	Rear-facing	0-12 mo	Exceeds height/weight limit
Convertible (RF)	Rear-facing	0-4+ yrs	Keep RF as long as possible!
Convertible (FF)	Forward-facing	2-7 yrs	Exceeds harness limit (~65 lbs)
Booster	Forward-facing	5-12 yrs	4'9" + passes seatbelt test

7 When to Replace Your Car Seat

 **Replace IMMEDIATELY if:**

- Moderate/severe crash (airbags deployed, injuries, damage)
- Seat has expired — check expiration date label
- Seat is recalled and cannot be repaired
- Visible damage — cracks, fraying, broken parts
- Unknown history — never buy used from strangers

 **QUICK 2-MINUTE CHECK — Before Every Drive!**

Run through these 5 checks:

- Seat tight?
- Harness height?
- Chest clip position?
- Pinch test?
- No bulky clothes?

 Pro Tips from Sarah

 **Winter Hack**

Buckle without coat, then coat on backwards or blanket over harness.

 **Free Help**

Find technician at [NHTSA.gov/carseat](https://www.nhtsa.gov/carseat). Fire stations offer free checks!

 **Take Photos**

After install, snap pics of belt routing for quick reference.

 **Monthly Check**

Seats loosen over time. Full check once a month.