

#2 IN A SERIES

# KIDS IN THE CAR

*Keeping them safe, secure and somewhat satisfied.*



**Count on Shell**

**When used properly, child safety seats are life preservers. They reduce an infant's risk of death by 69% and a toddler's by 47%. Yet millions of children ride without the right kind of restraint. More than a thousand die every year who are completely unbuckled. Understanding some basic safety seat principles will help you protect your littlest passengers.**

**Q.** For short trips, why bother with a child safety seat?

**A.** The greatest number of crashes occur on short trips at low speeds. Three-fourths of all crashes happen within 25 miles of home. And 40% of all fatal crashes take place on roads where the speed limit is 45 mph or less. Think of a child safety seat as a life preserver.



**Q.** An adult's lap is pretty safe, right?

**A.** Wrong. Grown-up arms are no substitute for a safety restraint. In a 30-mph crash, a child is thrown forward with a force equal to 20 times his or her weight. If the adult is not wearing a safety belt, the child could get crushed between the adult and the windshield or dashboard.

**Q. Where's the safest place for kids in the car?**

**A.** The back seat is the safest place for a child of any age. In the back, the child is farther away from the impact of a head-on collision, which can cause the most serious injuries. Just as important, the child is safely removed from the passenger air bag. Never put a rear-facing infant seat in the front when there's a passenger air bag. A safety seat in the front puts the child too close to the bag when it's inflating and can cause serious injury or death. If an older child must be seated in front, make sure he or she is correctly restrained for age and size — and always slide the vehicle seat as far back as possible.

**Q. But I'm not comfortable with my child in the back. Shouldn't she be closer to me?**

**A.** No. The back seat is the safest. It may help to compare your child in the back to when your child is

home sleeping. You probably don't feel the need to be right next to your baby all through the night or during a nap. A healthy baby properly secured in a safety seat

should not need constant watching. If a child in the back does need attention, don't try any one hand-on-the-wheel maneuvers. Just pull over.

*The safest place in the car for children is in the back seat—in the center, if you have center belts and an appropriate vehicle seat. The most distance from impact usually means the most protection.*

**Q. Does my car have a passenger-side air bag?**

**A.** Check your owner's manual to make sure. Often there is a warning label on the sun visor and/or the front of the right door frame. Also, the

air bag's compartment cover on the dash may be labeled SRS (Supplemental Restraint System) or SIR (Supplemental Inflation Restraint). But not all vehicles have a cover that shows in the dashboard.





*Air bags inflate at speeds up to 200 mph. The safest place for kids is in the back seat, correctly restrained.*

**Q. What about manual cut-off switches for air bags?**

**A.** According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, some people may need them. For more information and for permission to have an on-off switch installed in your vehicle, contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Auto Safety Hotline at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov) or 1-800-424-9393. And please remember that, with or without air bags, children are safer in the back seat, properly restrained.

**Q. There are so many kinds of safety seats. Which one is best?**

**A.** The best child safety seat is the one that fits the child, fits the vehicle and can be installed and used correctly every time. There are three basic types: 1) Rear-facing infant seats are designed for babies from birth until at least 20 pounds and one year of age. 2) Convertible safety seats "con-vert" from rear-facing to forward-facing for toddlers between one and four years of age, who weigh between 20 and 40

*Rear-facing infant car seats are small and portable and fit newborns best. Don't confuse them with infant carriers.*



*Convertible seats are used rear-facing for infants and forward-facing for toddlers.*



pounds. 3) Booster seats are used as a transition to safety belts by older kids who have clearly outgrown their convertible seat but are not quite ready for the vehicle's belt system.

**Q. Why does an infant seat have to face the rear?**

**A.** Babies need the extra protection provided by the back of the safety seat, which absorbs and spreads the force of the crash. The infant's neck muscles are weak. If the baby faces forward, the head could snap forward in a crash, risking serious injury to the neck and spinal cord.

**Q. How do I make sure the child safety seat is working properly?**

**A.** Read the instructions that come with it (keeping them handy at all times), and read all sections in

*Check your owner's manual and car seat instructions to see if you need a "locking clip" to help secure the child's seat. It comes with all seats.*



your vehicle owner's manual that discuss safety seat installation. This is especially important because many child safety seats and vehicle belt systems are not compatible. Children are properly restrained only when 1) the child fits securely in the safety seat, and 2) the safety seat itself fits securely in the vehicle seat. If it doesn't, contact the



*A booster seat raises the child so that the lap and shoulder belts fit properly. If your car only has lap belts, use a shield booster.*



*Usually, kids over 80 pounds and eight years of age can fit correctly in lap/shoulder belts.*



*Let the kids help put together an entertainment kit for the car.*

safety seat manufacturer. Also, don't forget to mail in the registration card that comes with a new seat. Then the manufacturer can let you know of any problems or recalls.

**Q. When are kids big enough for a regular seat belt?**

**A.** In general, when they're over 80 pounds and approximately eight years of age. Too many children start using regular belts too soon. Your child has a proper fit when 1) the lap belt stays low and snug across the hips without riding up over the stomach, and 2) the shoulder belt does not cross the face or front of the neck.

*Lots of popular games are available in miniature magnet versions designed for travel.*

**Q. The kids are properly restrained. How do I keep them from driving me crazy?**

**A.** Keep them occupied. At home, work with them and put together an "entertainment kit" for the car: games, audiocassettes, stuff to read, small tablets to color or write on, favorite toys, etc. Many of their favorite games are available in miniature magnetic versions designed for travel. (Make sure all items are lightweight and secured, so they don't become projectiles in the event of a crash.) The bookstore or the library will have books crammed with suggestions for enjoyable games requiring nothing more than an active imagination. You can also contact the National Safety Council at [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org) for materials. And of course, never



forget the all-important snack pack: crackers, fruit, pretzels, juice and other goodies.

**Q. Got any good suggestions for travel games?**

**A.** Here are four that have stood the test of time.

- *Beep*— Pick a type of road sign or other object you'll see fairly often: restaurant billboards, for example, or red pickup trucks. The first person to spot one and say "beep" gets a point. The first to get 10 points wins.

- *Zanzibar*— Each player has to complete the phrase, "I'm going to \_\_\_\_ on a \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_." Each key word must start with the same letter of the alphabet, beginning with A.

**CHILD SAFETY CHECKLIST**

*Get in the habit of asking yourself some key questions about your child's safety before turning on the ignition:*

- Is my child riding in the back seat properly restrained?
- Is the safety seat facing the right way?
- Are belts and harness straps secured tightly?
- Is my older child wearing the seat belt correctly?

*Save this for a break from competitive games. Kids can work together to keep track of how many times different road signs are spotted.*





*Even if your child is sleeping,  
don't leave him in the car while  
you tend to a quick errand.  
It's not worth the risks.*

For example, "I'm going to Alaska on an alligator to be an artist."

- *License Plates*—Give players a pad and pencil to jot down the different state license plates they see. Whoever finds the most states wins. Or have your passengers test their math skills with plate numbers. If they add up to more than 10, one team gets a point; 10 or less, the other team scores.

- *Guess How Far*—For longer trips on the highway, find something off in the distance such as a radio tower or an interesting landscape feature. Everybody guesses how many miles away it is, and the odometer will tell you who made the best guess.

*This has been written in cooperation with the National Safety Council ([www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)). It contains general recommendations that we believe will help children stay safe when they're riding in a car.*

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