

## COMMON CAR SEAT MISTAKES

Experts find that nearly 90 percent of car seats have one or more installation errors. This handout shows you four common mistakes and how to avoid them. To be sure your seat is installed correctly, have it checked at a certified inspection location. Go to [SaferCar.gov](http://SaferCar.gov) or call 1-866-SEAT-CHECK to find one near you.



### **MISTAKE #1: Getting a used car seat from someone you do not know**

- A used car seat could have been in a crash (even if you cannot see the damage), which can cause the seat to not work correctly. Also, it may have missing or damaged parts.
- A used car seat may have expired. Most seats expire after 6-10 years. This date is usually printed on the car seat.
- If possible, it is best to get a new car seat that has the most current safety features. If you must get a used seat, get it from a close friend or family member so you know the history of the seat. Also, be sure you get the instruction manual.



### **MISTAKE #2: Installing the car seat so that it is too loose**

- Using one hand, push and pull on the base at the belt path with the same force you would use to shake someone's hand. If it moves more than one inch side to side or front to back, then it is too loose.
- If it is too loose, start over and try to get a tighter fit. (Note: if you are installing with a seatbelt, be sure it is set in the "locked" position.)
- If you are using the seatbelt and can't get the seat installed tightly enough, try using your car's LATCH system (available in cars made since 2003). Or, if you're using the LATCH system and cannot get the seat tight enough, try the seatbelt.



### **MISTAKE #3: Keeping the harness straps on the baby too loose**

- If you can pinch a fold of the harness at your baby's shoulders, then it is too loose. Tighten the harness further. Slide the retainer clip to armpit level.
- For rear-facing car seats, the harness shoulder straps should be positioned so that they are level with, or below, your baby's shoulders—not above them.
- Coats and blankets should be placed over the harness, after your baby is strapped in—not under the harness.



### **MISTAKE #4: Turning your child forward-facing too soon**

- Keep your child in a rear-facing convertible car seat until they have reached the upper rear-facing height or weight limit of the seat.
- Staying rear-facing as long as possible is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and all of the leading safety organizations. Children between the ages of one and two are five times less likely to die in a crash if they are rear-facing.
- It is okay if your child's feet touch the back seat of your car or if their legs are bent. This will not hurt them.

## AS YOUR CHILD GROWS

As your child grows, it is important to consider the four steps to car seat safety. Each time you install a new or different car seat, have it checked at a certified inspection location. Go to [SaferCar.gov](http://SaferCar.gov) or call **1-866-SEAT-CHECK** to find one near you.

### STEP 1:



- Use a rear-facing infant carrier car seat.
- You can use this seat until your child reaches the upper height or weight limit of the seat.

*Note: you may choose to start with a rear-facing convertible seat instead of an infant carrier seat (see Step 2).*

### STEP 2:



- Switch to a convertible car seat, and use it in the rear-facing position.
- Keep your child rear-facing until they have reached the seat's rear-facing height or weight limit.
- It is okay if your child's feet touch the back seat of your car or if their legs are bent. This will not hurt them.

### STEP 3:



- Turn your child's convertible seat to the forward-facing position.
- Or, switch to a "forward-facing only" seat or "3-in-1" seat used in the forward-facing position with the harness.
- Have your child ride in this seat until they reach its upper height or weight limit, which might be around seven years old, depending on the seat.

### STEP 4:



- Switch to a booster seat. A high-back booster should be used if your vehicle's back seat (or its headrest) does not support your child's head. If your back seat offers head support, you can use a backless booster seat.
- Use a booster seat until your child fits in the vehicle seat as an adult does, which is usually between the ages of 10 or 12.
- For a seatbelt to fit properly, the lap belt must hug the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should fit snugly across the shoulder, not over the neck or face.

### NOTE:

- Children should continue to ride in the back seat until age 13.



## GENERAL INSTALLATION STEPS

Follow these general steps to install your infant carrier car seat with your seatbelt *or* the LATCH system (do not use them together). Remember to install it in the back seat of your car. Once you have it installed, have it checked at a certified inspection location. Go to [SaferCar.gov](http://SaferCar.gov) or call 1-866-SEAT-CHECK to find one near you.

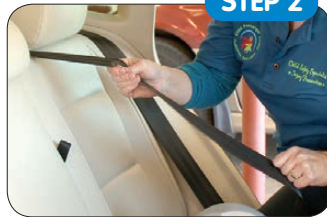
### INSTALLING WITH SEATBELT

#### STEP 1



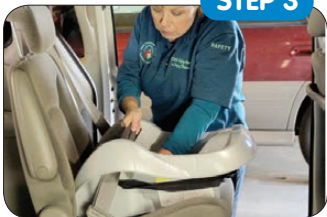
Thread the seatbelt through the belt path on the base and buckle it.

#### STEP 2



Lock the belt. Check your vehicle owner's manual to see how to lock the seatbelt in your own vehicle. (Or see if the base locks the belt for you.)

#### STEP 3



Press down on the center of the base and remove any slack from the belt. Continue until the base is secure.

#### STEP 4



Using one hand, pull and push on the base (side to side and front to back) with the force of a handshake. It should not move more than one inch.

#### STEP 5



Click the seat onto the base. Check your car seat's instruction manual to be sure you are traveling with the handle in the correct position.

#### STEP 6

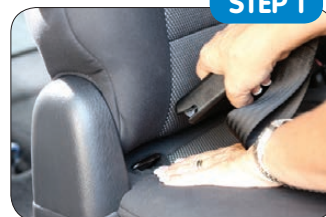


Check the angle of the seat using the "recline indicator" that tells you when your seat is reclined correctly.

### INSTALLING WITH LATCH

*Note: To use LATCH, your vehicle must have lower LATCH anchors and your car seat must have LATCH connectors.*

#### STEP 1



Hook both LATCH connectors on the base to the lower anchor bars.

#### STEP 2



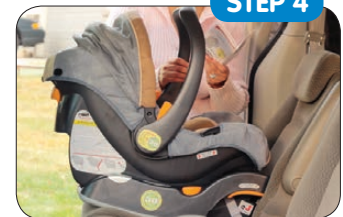
Press down on the center of the base and pull the strap tight.

#### STEP 3



Using one hand, pull and push on the base (side to side and front to back) with the force of a handshake. It should not move more than one inch.

#### STEP 4

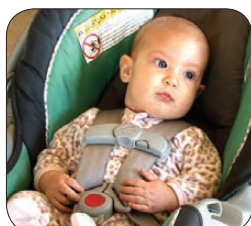


Click the seat onto the base. Check your car seat's instruction manual to be sure you are traveling with the handle in the correct position.

#### STEP 5



Check the angle of the seat using the "recline indicator" that tells you when your seat is reclined correctly.



### Securing Your Baby

- Be sure that the harness shoulder straps are positioned so that they are level with, or below, your baby's shoulders—not above them.
- Snap the harness retainer clip together. Slide it to armpit level, where it will stay during travel.
- Tighten the harness. If you can pinch a fold of the harness at your baby's shoulders, then it is too loose.