

RSA

# Child Safety in Cars

A guide to keeping children safe while travelling in the car



VISION  
ZERO



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# Introduction

Children are one of the most vulnerable people in our society, and no parent or guardian would knowingly put a child's life in danger. However, an astonishing number of parents allow their children to travel in vehicles without being properly restrained, placing their lives and safety at risk.

## Child casualties aged 0–15 years, 2014–2023

### 68 children lost their lives

on our roads over the past decade.

### Children were most at risk of being killed

on the road from April to August, and between 4pm and 8pm, with Thursday and Saturday being the highest risk days of the week.



In a quarter of vehicle occupant fatalities, **no seat belts were being used.**

**980 children were seriously injured**

during the same period.

Source: Road Safety Authority

In a crash at just 50km/h, a child not wearing a seat belt or not using a child car seat would be thrown forward with a force 30 to 60 times their body weight. They would be thrown about inside the vehicle, injuring themselves and, quite possibly, seriously injuring or even killing other people inside the vehicle. They are also likely to be ejected from the car through one of the windows.



## Important

### It is dangerous to hold a child on your lap.

In a crash, the child could be crushed between your body and part of the car's interior. Even if you are using a safety belt, the child would be torn from your arms: you would not be able to hold on to them, no matter how hard you try. It is also dangerous to put a safety belt around yourself and a child (or around two children). The safest way for children to travel in cars is in a child seat that is suitable for their weight and height.



In Ireland, **over half of child car seats are incorrectly fitted** which can lead to serious injury or even death in a collision.

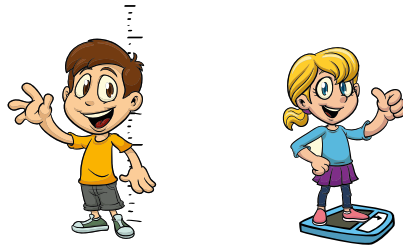


**Children are one of the most vulnerable categories of road user. Don't let your child be a statistic.**



# The law

- All children under 150cm in height or 36kg in weight must use a child restraint system (CRS) suitable for their height and weight while travelling in a car or goods vehicle (other than a taxi). An example of a CRS would be a child car seat or high-back booster seat. Regulation R129/i-Size has specific height metrics.

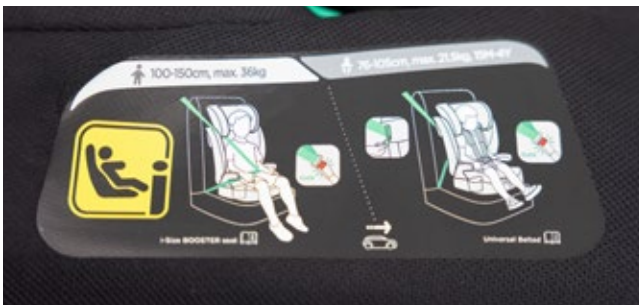


**150cm or 36kg**

- Since 1 September 2024, child seats approved to Regulation R44 can no longer be sold by retailers, marketplaces, and e-commerce in the EU. Seats made available from these suppliers must now comply with Regulation R129. Child seats approved to R129 have undergone more rigorous testing and provide improved head and neck protection compared to seats approved to the previous R44 regulation. It's important to understand that consumers can still use a seat which conforms to R44 which was purchased prior to 1 September 2024.
- Rear-facing child car seats **must not be used** in passenger seats protected by an active frontal airbag. An airbag that deploys (opens up) in front of a rear-facing child car seat can cause serious injury or even death if there is a collision.
- There is no law against children sitting in the front seat, as long as they are using the right child restraint for their height and weight. However, it is illegal to use a rear-facing child car seat in a passenger seat protected by an airbag. The deployment of an airbag where a rear-facing child car seat is in place can cause serious injury or even death to the child.
- Please refer to the vehicle handbook regarding the use of car seats on the front passenger seat with regards to the airbag.
- It is illegal to place a rear-facing child seat in the front where there is an active airbag. You may receive at least 3 penalty points on your driving licence as a penalty. Drivers have a legal responsibility to ensure that all passengers under 17 are appropriately restrained in the vehicle.
- Children should always travel in the back of the car, away from active frontal airbags and the dashboard.
- Taxi and bus drivers are exempt from supplying child car seats.

# Standards

- All seats sold in Ireland must meet European standards, UN ECE Regulation R129/i-Size or Regulation 129. (See the paragraph on R129/i-Size on page 6.) Look for the 'E' mark.



# ISOFIX and R129/i-Size regulations

## What is ISOFIX?

ISOFIX is an international standard of built-in attachment points in a car's structure to fit a child seat. A child seat can easily be plugged into the ISOFIX system which greatly reduces the risk of fitting the seat incorrectly.

All new vehicles from 2006 onwards have ISOFIX points built in and more child seat manufacturers are producing child seats that suit the ISOFIX system.

See illustrations of ISOFIX system on pages 19 and 20.



## What is R129/i-Size?

R129/ i-Size (Regulation 129) is a European standard which was introduced in Ireland in September 2014. The key benefits of R129/ i-Size-standard seats are that they can be fitted to most ISOFIX systems and that they provide increased support for the child's head and neck. They also provide better side-impact protection in the event of collisions. An R129/ i-Size seat also allows your child to stay rear-facing for much longer (up to a minimum of 15 months old in a rear-facing child seat). The categorisation of these seats is based on height or weight rather than weight or size. The RSA advocates rear-facing your child as long as possible, with some rear-facing seats potentially going up to 125cm or 36kg.



# Types of child car seats

A properly fitted child restraint system keeps the child in their seat, preventing them from being thrown about inside or being thrown from the vehicle. It also absorbs some of the impact force. This means that your child is much less likely to be killed or injured in a crash.

An appropriate child restraint is one that:

- conforms to UNECE Regulation 129, or later versions of the standards 44/04 or 44/03;
- is suitable for the child's weight and height;
- is correctly fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

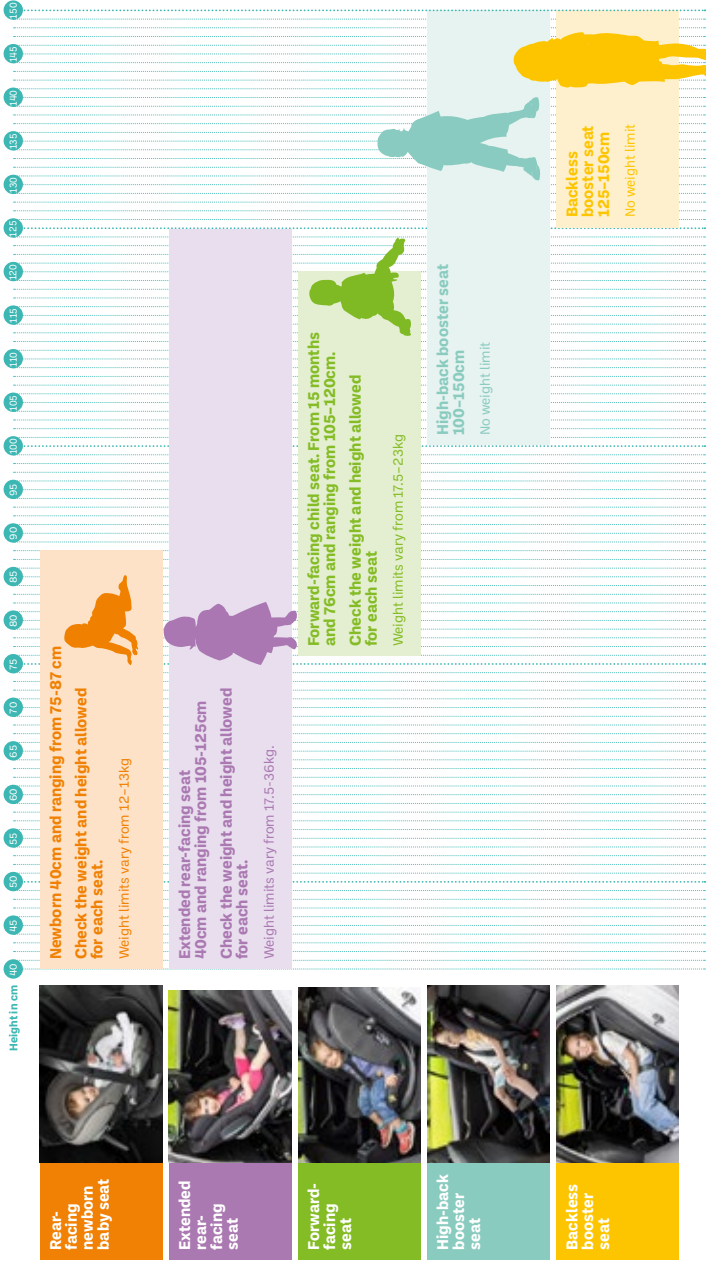
Child restraints are categorised according to the height or weight of the children they are suitable for. These height or weight categories correspond broadly to different age groups, but it is the height or weight of the child that is most important when deciding what type of child restraint to use. Child restraints are designed specifically by height and weight. In the categories for older children, child restraints are by height only, with no weight limits.

These categories are designed by height and weight specifically, either sitting, rear-facing or forward-facing. However, some child restraint systems are convertible and can be adapted as the child grows. This means that the restraint system could fit into more than one category. For example, you might have a seat that can be used as a harnessed seat for a child up to 105cm or 22kg but can then turn into a high-back booster seat. This seat, therefore, falls into two different categories. It is important to be aware of your child's height and weight throughout the time using the child seat.

Type of seat	Age/Height	Weight
<b>Rear-facing newborn seats</b>	Birth to 75–87cm	Check seat for weight limit 12–13kg
<b>Forward-facing toddler seats</b>	15months and 76cm to 105–120cm	Check seat for weight limit 17.5–23kg
<b>Combination rear-facing and forward-facing toddler seats</b>	Rear-facing 40–105cm Forward-facing 15 months and 76–105cm	Check seat for weight limit 17.5–22kg
<b>Extended rear-facing toddler seats</b>	Birth to 105–125cm	Check seat for weight limit 17.5–36kg
<b>High-back booster seats</b>	100–150cm	No weight limit
<b>Backless booster seats</b>	125–150cm	No weight limit



# Measure your child's height and weight to help determine the best type of seat for them



NB This advice refers to Regulation 129 (i-Size) only. If you would like advice on any other seats or older regulations, please contact us on [checktiffs@sa.ie](mailto:checktiffs@sa.ie)

## Rear-facing newborn baby seats

These rear-facing seats can be used in the front or rear of the car, but it is safer to put them in the rear.

**Never put your child in the front passenger seat if there is an active passenger airbag.**

Rear-facing seats provide greater protection for a baby's head, neck and spine than forward-facing seats. Only move your baby on to the next stage when they have reached the maximum height or weight of their particular seat. Check seat manufacturer's guidelines for specific height and weight limits of a child seat. **It is best to keep your baby in a rear-facing seat for as long as possible.** Only move them to the next stage seat once they have gone over the maximum weight for the baby seat or reached the specific height limit of their seat. Check the height limit on the side of the seat. Pay particular attention to the manufacturer's instructions about where to position the carrying handle of the car seat while travelling (for example: should the handle be to the front of the seat, the back of the seat or in the carrying position). There is always a diagram on the side of these newborn seats showing the correct position of the handle. See image below.



ISOFIX fitted car seat



Seat belt fitted car seat

## Extended rear-facing child seats

Children are especially vulnerable in the event of a car crash. Their heads are disproportionately heavy in relation to the rest of the body and the neck muscles are not yet fully developed. A child's head accounts for 25 per cent of their body weight and size compared to 6 per cent for an adult. Therefore, babies need extra support to protect their neck and head from a whiplash-type injury. Because of this, rear-facing car seats provide more support for your baby than forward-facing seats. They protect your baby's head and neck much better than a forward-facing car seat does.



This is because, in an impact, the force is spread out much more, rather than being focused completely on the baby's neck, as would be the case in a forward-facing child car seat. Extended rear-facing is highly recommended, and children should use these rear facing seats for as long as possible.

Only move your child out of a rear-facing baby carrier when they reach the height maximum of the specific seat, or they have gone over the maximum weight outlined by the manufacturer. Some extended rear-facing seats can accommodate children up to 125cm or 36kg in the rearward position. They are larger than the newborn rear-facing seats and can be more complex to install. Make sure they can be fitted safely and securely into the car, as some cars may not be suitable.



### **Important!**

Some parents think that children should progress to a forward-facing child car seat as soon as they have outgrown their rear-facing newborn seat. This is not the case. For the most protection, your child should remain rear-facing for as long as possible.



## Forward-facing child seat

The advice is to use a rear-facing child seat for your child for as long as possible, but if changing to a forward-facing seat, the child must be a minimum of 15 months old and 76cm in height.



## Convertible child seats

Some child seats are designed to be 'convertible'. This means that the seat can be adjusted as the child grows. Therefore, it may be used for two different stages depending on the height and weight specifications of the seat.

For example, a child seat can be used as a forward or rear-facing seat with an integrated harness up to 105cm or 22kg, but when the child reaches the height or weight limits, the harness can be removed and the seat converted into a high-back booster seat from 100-150cm with no weight limit.



Examples of convertible child seats



With internal harness



With adult seat belt

## High-back booster seat

It is recommended that you get a booster seat that gives as much protection as possible to a child's head, neck and spine. These seats are commonly called 'high-back booster seats'. Booster seats raise the child up high enough so that the seat belt is positioned correctly on their bodies (on the shoulder, not the neck, and on the pelvis, not the stomach).

Booster seats do not have an internal (built-in) harness. The adult seat belt fitted in the car goes around the child and through the appropriate guides of the seat. It is important that the seat belt is properly adjusted so that it is correctly positioned on the child's shoulder and pelvis, and that there is no slack in the seat belt when it's fastened. This category of seat under R129 regulations is from 100-150cm with no weight limit.

Some booster seats are designed to be converted into a backless booster later on by detaching the back rest. Check manufacturer's instructions to determine the seat categories.



Examples of high-back booster seats



With adult seat-belt

## Backless booster

Backless boosters are available for children from 125–150cm and have no weight limit. They do not have an internal harness to hold the child in place. Because of this, it is not recommended using backless boosters for children under 125cm and 22kg. The adult seat belt goes around the child and through the appropriate guides of the seat, so it is important that the seat belt is correctly adjusted and that there is no slack in the seat belt when fastened.

Backless boosters raise the child up high enough so that the seat belt is positioned correctly on their bodies (on the shoulder, not the neck, and on the pelvis, not the stomach).

Children should use a high-back booster seat for as long as possible – up to 150cm – rather than the backless booster by itself. The backless booster on its own provides no back or head protection, and is designed for older, taller children coming towards the end of their time using child seats.



Examples of backless booster seats



Seat belt is in the correct position.



Seat belt in a dangerous position – backless booster needed.

# Buying a child car seat

When choosing a new child seat, make sure that it fits in your car (or cars, if you use it in more than one) and is suitable for the height and weight of your child. Use the checklist below to help you select the child seat that is most suitable for your child and your vehicle(s).

The RSA recommends contacting retailers who have signed up to the Code of Practice for retailers. The Code of Practice lays out a set of standards in relation to child safety in cars and the provision of good information and fitting practices with respect to child seats. See section on the **RSA Code of practice for retailers** on our website – [www.rsa.ie/road-safety/road-users/passengers/children/child-seats](http://www.rsa.ie/road-safety/road-users/passengers/children/child-seats).

## What do I need to know when choosing a child car seat for my child?

- |                                                                  | YES                   | NO                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Is the child car seat suitable for my child?                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Is the child car seat suitable for the type of car I drive?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Did I get expert advice when I was choosing the car seat?     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Does the seat I've chosen meet the correct European standard? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Are the instructions easy to understand and follow?           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Did I think about airbags?                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Does my car have back seats?                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Does my car have ISOFIX points and top tether points?         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Is it OK to use a second-hand car seat?                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. Do I know how to use and install the seat correctly?         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you are unsure about anything on this checklist, you should ask a child car seat expert for advice.

### 1. Is the child car seat suitable for my child?

It is very important to make sure that the child car seat is suitable for your child's **height** and **weight**. Refer to the manufacturer's guidelines on each car seat.

### 2. Is the child car seat suitable for the type of car I drive?

The shape of car vehicle seats, the length of seat belts and the position of seat belt anchor points and the position/height of ISOFIX points are different in different cars. So, **not all child seats fit all cars**. For instance, the seat belt in a particular car may be too short to go around a particular child seat. Make sure you check that the child seat you buy will fit in your car and that it will fit in all the seat positions you intend to use it (for example, the back passenger side, the third row in a people carrier, and so on). The manufacturer's instructions should help you fit the child car seat. However, when you buy it, it is always best to have it fitted by an expert and to be shown how to fit it correctly yourself. The RSA recommends retailers who have signed up to the RSA Code of Practice for retailers.

### 3. Did I get expert advice when I was choosing the car seat?

Make sure you get advice from a child car seat expert, retailer or RSA child car seat expert. Some retailers know more than others about suitable options of child car seats and will be able to give a guide of how long a seat will last your child based on their percentiles. An expert will be able to advise you on which type of car seat is suitable for your child's height and weight. You should choose a retailer who can expertly fit the child car seat into your car to make sure it is a suitable match. They should also show you how the child car seat should be fitted into your car.

### 4. Does the seat I've chosen meet the correct European standard?

Check that the seat you are buying meets the European standard R129/i-Size. If it does, you should see a yellow or orange sticker with an 'E' mark and height and weight guidelines on the seat.

### 5. Are the instructions easy to understand and follow?

Make sure the child car seat comes with an instruction manual or QR code to download fitting instructions. Try to have the car seat fitted into the car before you buy it. Ask the expert to show you how to fit the car seat. If this is not possible, you should make sure that there is an easy-to-follow instruction manual with the seat and that you fully understand it. Child seats that comply with the R129/i-Size standard will have QR codes or barcodes that link to video instructions or other fitting instructions and information about the particular child seat.



## 6. Did I think about airbags?

It is an offence to place a rear-facing child car seat in the front seat if the front seat is protected by an active frontal airbag. Make sure the child seat can be fitted in the back.

## 7. Does my car have back seats?

While it is recommended that children travel in the back seat away from airbags and the dashboard, if you must place the child car seat in the front, make sure that the seat is appropriate to the child's height and weight. **A rear-facing child car seat must not be used in the front seat where there is an active airbag.**

Think carefully about driving with a child in the front seat – even in the forward position. You must make sure that the passenger seat is rolled back as far away from the dashboard as possible without impeding the safety of any passengers in the seat behind. This could help to reduce the severity of injuries that may be caused to your child if the airbag is released. Remember: airbags are designed for adults. A child, even in a child car seat, does not replicate (copy) the typical position of an adult in the passenger seat.

## 8. Does my car have the ISOFIX or is my car compatible with i-Size?

Check if your vehicle(s) has an ISOFIX system suitable for the seat. Ask whether an additional top tether on the seat is needed for extra stability. A **top tether** is connected to the top of the child car seat and is attached to extra anchor points in the car – for example, in the boot. Some car seats have a support leg that extends to the vehicle floor for stability. If this is the case, check that it does not rest on the cover of an underfloor compartment as this may be unsafe.



ISOFIX connection points in the back seat.

(Some are not clearly marked, so you should consult your car manual for advice in this case.)



ISOFIX connectors on the child car seat



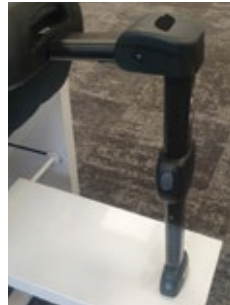
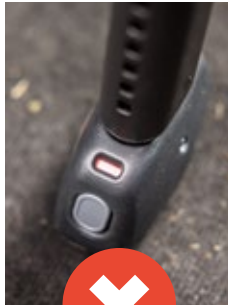
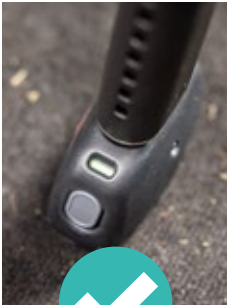
Plugging in the ISOFIX connectors into the connection points



**Red** indicators to tell you it's not properly connected



**Green** indicators to tell you it's properly connected



ISOFIX support leg to provide stability





Anchor point for attaching the top tether strap to



Top tether strap to provide extra restraint and stability. **Green** indicates top tether is correctly fitted, **red** indicates incorrect fitting.



Lower tethers and connection points



### **Important!**

When plugging the ISOFIX connectors into the connection points, make sure the appropriate indicators turn green on both sides, as in the illustration. Green indicators let you know the connection is safe.

## 9. Should I buy a second-hand car seat?

It is better to buy a new car seat. However, if you decide to buy a second-hand car seat, you need to be aware of certain risks and ask some important questions.

For example:

- **How old is the seat?** Generally, manufacturers recommend use of car seats for no more than 10 years due to wear and tear and possible weakened parts. Check the manufacturer manual for advice.
- **Has the seat ever been in a crash?** You should be satisfied with the history of the child car seat. Damage might not be visible, so you should inspect it thoroughly and make sure the frame has not been weakened or damaged. If there was more than bumper damage caused to the car, you should consider replacing the child car seat.
- **Are there parts missing?** You should be certain that all the parts required to fit the seat safely are there and intact – for example, lock-off clips, harness chest pads, and so on.
- **Does it meet the European standards?** You should investigate whether the seat conforms to European standards. Remember to look for the E-mark.
- **Will it fit my car?** You should also be certain that the seat is suitable for your child and is compatible with your car.
- **Does it still have the manual and fitting instructions?** You should make sure that the seat comes with a manufacturer's manual and fitting instructions or QR or barcode links to instructions.



### Important!

The benefits of buying a new seat are that you know the standard of compliance, the condition of the seat, and you can talk to an expert about its suitability for your child and your car. Also, you will have peace of mind that there are no missing pieces.

**10. If it was involved in a crash, has it been inspected thoroughly?**

A car seat which has been involved in a crash should be carefully inspected and if there was more than bumper damage caused to the car you should consider buying a new seat.

Damage or weakened points may not be visible, and the child car seat may not perform as well as it should in a collision.

Check under the seat fabrics to ensure that the polystyrene is not broken or cracked.



# Fitting child seats

## Where should I fit the child car seat?

Ideally, fit your child's car seat in the back seat. This means that the child is away from airbags and the dashboard. If you must place the child car seat in the front, make sure that it is suitable for the child's height and weight.

Do not use a rear-facing child car seat in the front seat where there is an active airbag.

## How do I fit the child car seat?

You should always choose a retailer who can fit your child car seat for you, and show you how to fit it correctly yourself. You should also make sure you get the instruction manual with your car seat on how to fit it safely in your car. The RSA has published a helpful online set of videos and instructions to help with fitting your child seat and gives examples of how to fit some child car seats.

## How do I know if the child car seat is fitted correctly?

Once you have followed the instructions on how to fit the child car seat, it is easy to test if it is fitted correctly. The child car seat should sit firmly on the back seat with little or no forward or sideways movement when tested. You can simply push the seat to test this, or you can fasten the harness straps and pull it from the centre as if to exert a similar force a child would in the event of heavy braking. If you are in any doubt, you should visit the RSA Check it Fits service or book a virtual call online at [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits) and speak to one of our experts.

## What is 'buckle crunch'?

Car seats that use the adult seat belt to secure the seat should not have the seat belt buckle sitting across the frame of the child car seat. Buckle crunch is where the buckle of the seat belt is resting on the frame of the car seat. The movement of the car while travelling could cause the buckle to open. Also, on impact, the buckle could be broken, causing the child car seat to become loose or detached in the car, giving little or no protection to the child in the seat. The webbing of the seat belt is designed to hold the seat in place.



The photo below is an example of buckle crunch.



## Before you fit a child car seat, remember:

- Read the manufacturer's instructions carefully. If you have lost your manual, you should get a replacement from the retailer or manufacturer.
- The seat belt must pass through all the required green R129/i-Size seat belt-routing guides (green new regulations or red/blue old regulations) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Remember, some guides are only intended to be used on one side or the other, depending on what side of the car the seat is being fitted on.



## Helpful tips for fitting child car seats

- First, you should kneel into the seat, exerting your weight. Then, tighten the seat belt as much as you can to remove all the slack. This ensures that the seat is fitted as tightly as possible.
- Hand pressure is not enough when you are securing the child car seat with the seat belt.
- It is safer to fit a child car seat in the back. If fitting a child car seat into the front seat, roll the seat itself back as far as it can go away from dashboard without impeding the safety of any passengers in the seat behind.
- If you take the child seat out of the car, make sure you fit it properly every time you put it back in.
- If your car seat stays in the car permanently, you should still check it regularly to make sure it is securely held and there is no slack in the seat belt.
- Never adjust or modify the seat or seat belt. A child seat should be suitable for the child and be compatible with the car. Therefore, modifications (changes) to either should not be necessary.
- Get a child car seat expert to fit the child car seat or check it for you if you are in any doubt. You can book a virtual call with one of the RSA child seat expert checkers to help you with the fit of your car seat or to answer any questions or concerns you may have. To book an appointment go to [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits)
- The safety belt buckle should not rest across the frame of the child seat causing buckle crunch.
- Regularly check the seat and buckles to make sure no food debris has lodged in the mechanism or other loose items are interfering with the seat.



## What are the common fitting errors?

To be effective, child restraint systems (seats, cushions and so on) must be fitted and used correctly. Surveys have consistently shown that a high proportion of child restraints are incorrectly fitted, usually for one or more of these reasons, which are easy to watch out for:

- **Seat belt has too much slack** in it causing the fitting to be very loose.
- Seat belt **not routed** through child seat correctly.
- Buckle resting across the frame of the child car seat, causing **buckle crunch** which may cause the buckle to open.
- **Handle on infant seat not positioned properly.** You can check diagrams on the side of the seat to see which position the handle is in.
- The child seat is **too big or too small for the child.**
- Child seat **not compatible with the car.**
- Child seat has **exceeded the manufacturer's recommended guideline** for duration of use and is in bad condition.

## How do I secure my child into a car seat?

- Your child should use the child seat for every single journey – no matter how short.
- Take time to get the child comfortably strapped in.
- Make sure the seat's harness or seat belt is correctly adjusted for your child.
- The harness or seat belt should be quite tight.

If a harness is being used in rear-facing seats, it should be tight enough that only two fingers can fit between the top of the child's shoulders and the harness but your fingers should be unable to rotate (turn) in that position, or there is resistance when turning your fingers.

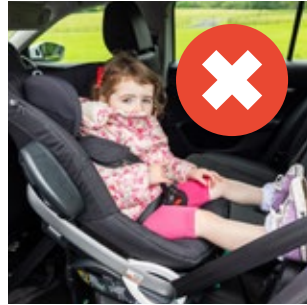


If a harness is being used in forward-facing seats, it should be tight enough that only two fingers can fit between your child's collarbone and the harness, but your fingers should be unable to rotate in that position or there is resistance when turning your fingers.

- If the seat is fitted using either the seat belt or ISOFIX system, it is important to regularly check that the seat belt buckle is actually connected or the ISOFIX is clicked in and indicating a correct fit.

- Recommended height positions for the harness. For rear-facing, the harness should be just below the shoulders. For forward facing, the harness should be just above the shoulders.

- Clothing can affect how snugly the harness fits, so you should use blankets instead of bulky jackets in the winter. This makes sure that the harness is making secure contact with your child's body and you should check this before every journey.



Example of how bulky clothes directly affect the safety of the harness on the child

- If you are using a high-back booster or backless booster seat, the adult seat belt restrains both the child and the seat or cushion. Where the seat has routing guides, these should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Never tuck the seat belt under the child's arm or behind their back.
- Some children go through a phase of slipping out of the harness or releasing the buckle. You should make sure that the harness is adjusted correctly and that your child is comfortable. Never travel in a vehicle without all children correctly secured in their car seats.



## Remember

Do not use any device that changes the mechanism required by law that allows for the buckle to be undone in one action. Modified straps can affect the performance of the child seat itself. When modification is made to straps, the design and load-bearing points of the straps are altered which can lead to serious injury.

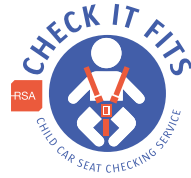


## Important

Children learn from you, so always set a good example by wearing your own seat belt.

# Check it Fits service

The RSA has introduced 'Check it Fits' in response to a frightening statistic that shows that **over half of child car seats are incorrectly fitted**. Incorrect fitting can result in serious injury or a fatality in the event of a collision.



The RSA 'Check it Fits' service is a full-time, nationwide, free, expert service that aims to put parents', grandparents' and guardians' minds at ease that their child's car seat is safely and securely fitted in their car. The Check it Fits service also includes the virtual service, which gives you access to one of the RSA child seat experts. Go to [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits) to book an appointment for a voice or video call.

In 2024, over 5,800 child car seats were checked. 54% were non-compliant meaning the car seat needed some type of adjustment. Worryingly, many of those seats required a major adjustment. Sixty-two of the seats checked were condemned – they were not fit for purpose, meaning they could have caused injury or even death if there was a collision.

The Check it Fits service is quick and free of charge. It travels around the country, and our experts will advise on how to fix any problem. They will demonstrate how to fit the restraints correctly and answer any questions you might have.

You can check when the Check it Fits service is in your area by logging on to [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits) or phoning 096 25000.



Log onto [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits) to see when Check it Fits is in your area. You can also follow us on social media:



# Adapting adult seat belts to suit a child

The position of a seat belt on the body is very important. A simple correction to the position of the seat belt on your body can make a significant difference to the severity of injuries in a collision.

Seat belts are designed for those who are 150cm in height and taller. Don't let your child start using the seat belt on its own too soon as this can cause serious injuries to the child if there is a collision. Three-point safety belts (lap and diagonal) provide greater protection than lap belts.

## How to buckle a seat belt

1. Allow plenty of excess strap and plug the seat belt into buckle.
2. Position the lap section of the belt on the pelvic region / tops of thighs – **not on the stomach.**
3. Pull the slack on the lap section of the belt and feed up to the shoulder.
4. Position the diagonal section of the belt across the torso (chest) and on the shoulder – **not the neck.**

Some cars have seat belt shoulder-height adjusters to help position the seat belt on top of your shoulder.

The same positioning applies to children using adult seat belts with their child car seat (high-back boosters and backless boosters).



# Wearing a seat belt during pregnancy

Pregnancy does not automatically exempt you from wearing a seat belt. You are excused from using a seat belt during pregnancy only if you have an exemption granted by a doctor for medical reasons.

The **safest way** for pregnant women to wear a seat belt is to:

- Place the diagonal section of the belt across the torso (chest area) with the strap resting over the shoulder, not the neck.
- Place the lap section of the belt flat on the thighs, fitting comfortably beneath the baby bump and over the pelvis (not the bump).
- Wear the seat belt as tightly as possible as in this way, the forces applied in a sudden impact can be absorbed by the body's frame.



## Remember

If pregnant, **you should avoid wearing 'lap-only' seat belts instead of a regular seat belt** (lap and diagonal belts). Lap-only belts can cause serious injuries to unborn children if the car brakes suddenly or is in a collision. Mother and unborn child are both **much safer if a lap and diagonal seat belt is being worn correctly.**



## **Premature and low birth-weight babies**

If you have a premature or low birth-weight baby, ask the hospital before you are discharged to assess if it is safe for the baby to travel in a baby seat. If you are in any doubt at all about your child travelling in the car, consult the hospital or your GP for further advice.





## Choosing a family car

If you are thinking about buying a new car for the family, you should examine closely all the safety information relating to the model of car you're thinking of buying. One source of this kind of information is **Euro NCAP** (New Car Assessment Programme). It will give you a realistic and independent assessment of the safety performance of some of the most popular cars sold in Europe.

The RSA Check it Fits team have a vast amount of experience with different type of cars and child seat positioning. Contact the team on [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits) to book a phone call or virtual call to discuss car options.

Information can be found at: [www.euroncap.com](http://www.euroncap.com)

Some people don't know if they have ISOFIX or top tether connectors in their car. You should ask about these, as sometimes they are not labelled or visible at first glance.

You should also be aware of where the airbags are in the car and how they are controlled. Remember, **it is illegal to place a rear-facing child car seat in the front of the car where there is an active airbag.**

You should also consult your car manual to find out areas of the car are suitable for fitting child car seats, as some vehicle seats are not approved for use with child seats. For example, you may not be able to fit ISOFIX seats in places where there are underfloor storage boxes.

# Problem behaviour

Some children go through a phase of constantly slipping out of the child seat harness or seat belt, incorrectly adjusting straps or seat belts, or releasing the buckle during journeys. This can be very worrying and frustrating for parents or guardians. It could be serious or even fatal for a child if the manufacturer's guidelines are not carefully followed.

You should check that:

- the harness or seat belt is adjusted correctly to your child, in line with the manufacturer's guidelines, and
- your child is comfortable.

Incorrectly adjusted harness straps may cause your child to be uncomfortable, leading them to push straps off or open buckles.

**Here are some typical problem behaviours with advice on what you can do.**

If your child:

- **slips their arms out of the harness**, make sure the shoulder straps are resting on, or slightly above, their shoulders in a forward-facing seat.
- **pushes the safety belt under their arms, behind their back or into an incorrect position**, make sure the seat belt is correctly positioned on your child's shoulder and pelvic area and that they are comfortable.
- **releases buckles**, make sure buckles are correctly fastened at all times.



## Remember

It is most important for the driver not to be distracted by children adjusting straps or seat belts mid-journey. Pull over, only when it is safe to do so, until you can refasten the straps. If the problem persists, consider taking another adult as a passenger to help watch the children.

# Dangers of leaving children unattended in a vehicle

Infants or young children should never be left unattended in a motor vehicle.

A variety of hazards can arise, even if you are only away for a short while. These include:

- an outbreak of fire;
- breathing problems on warm days;
- accidental trapping of children in electronically operated windows; and
- leaving your car keys in your car when you are not in it.

For further information on child safety in cars, see [www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits)

## Child seat mirrors

Child seat mirrors are designed so you can avoid turning your head, enabling you to keep an eye on your child in their rear-facing car seat, as long as it does not cause a distraction.



## Loose items in the car and potential hazards

It is important to avoid having loose items around the inside of the car as these are potential hazards in the event of a collision.



# Use of devices or accessories purchased separately from the child car seat

The RSA does not recommend the use of devices or accessories purchased separately from the child car seat. The only exception is when the manufacturer of your specific child car seat has tested and approved the device or accessory for use with their product. There are few examples of these types of products. Child car seats are highly regulated and vigorously tested. They are designed to react or perform a certain way in the case of a collision. Any device or accessory that interferes with this process is deemed unsafe and potentially dangerous.



These devices are generally on sale in online stores and marketplaces. In some cases, the device completely alters the alignment of the seatbelt on a child's body. This means the seatbelt is not doing what it is meant to do in the event of a collision.

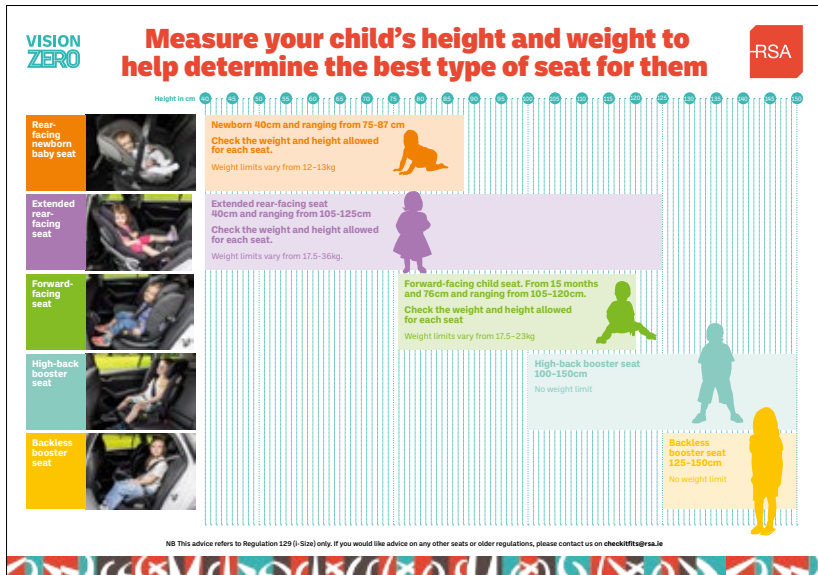
Other devices claiming to be similar to the Isofix system in your car, which can be bought online easily and fitted to a car using straps are also dangerous. Isofix and top tether systems in all cars are crash tested and are highly regulated under EU law making them certifiably safe to use. In contrast, these devices are not tested to the same EU standards or the child car seat manufacturers testing guidelines.

We also do not recommend the use of head support straps or similar devices. Possible risks of using head support straps may include injury to your child's spine or neck in the event of a collision.

If you have any concerns regarding the safety of your child while driving, please contact our Check It Fits service by logging on to **[www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits)** or by phoning 096 25000.



# Further information



[www.rsa.ie/checkitfits](http://www.rsa.ie/checkitfits)

096 25000

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# Choosing a child car seat checklist

## What do I need to know when choosing a child car seat for my child?

- |                                                                  | YES                   | NO                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Is the child car seat suitable for my child?                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Is the child car seat suitable for the type of car I drive?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Did I get expert advice when I was choosing the car seat?     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Does the seat I've chosen meet the correct European standard? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Are the instructions easy to understand and follow?           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Did I think about airbags?                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Does my car have back seats?                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Does my car have ISOFIX points and top tether points?         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Is it OK to use a second-hand car seat?                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. Do I know how to use and install the seat correctly?         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**If you are unsure about anything on this checklist, you should ask a child car seat expert for advice.**

## Notes





Údaras Um Shábháileacht Ar Bhóithre  
Road Safety Authority

Páirc Ghnó Ghleann na Muaidhe, Cnoc an tSabhaircín,  
Bóthar Bhaile Átha Cliath, Béal an Átha, Co. Mhaigh Eo

Moy Valley Business Park, Primrose Hill,  
Dublin Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo, F26 V6E4

(096) 25 000  
info@rsa.ie  
www.rsa.ie

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