

A guide to buying child car seats



To ensure maximum safety for children on car journeys, parents are legally required to fit their vehicles with car seats until their children reach the age of 12 or a height of 135cm.

As a result, parents will need to buy a number of car seats for their children at different stages of their life.

However, with a number of rules regarding the type of car seat children will need depending on their size and weight, it's important that parents identify which car seat suits the needs of their family most effectively.

Child car seat types

There are five main car seat types, and weight is the main factor in deciding which car seat is appropriate for your child.

Rear-facing baby seats

Rear-facing seats are suitable for babies up to 13kg. Rear-facing car seats can be used in both the front seats and the back seats.

Rear-facing car seats can provide much needed support for the baby's head, neck and spine.

See section below for important information regarding airbags.

Forward or rear-facing baby seats

For children weighing between 9kg to 18kg, parents have the option of using forward or rear-facing baby seats. Parents may opt for a combination child car seat that allows them to place the seat in either direction to give them added flexibility. Forward-facing car seats should ideally be fitted in the rear of the car.

See section below for important information regarding airbags.

Forward-facing child car seats

Forward-facing child car seats, or booster seats, are suitable for children weighing between 15 to 25kg and sit in an upright position in the rear of your car.

The back-rest in the forward-facing child car seat can provide the support your children need to make the transition from baby seats to child car seats.

The main benefit of forward-facing child car seats is to raise your child's position up to the right level that so that they have maximum protection from the seat belt.



Booster cushions

Booster cushions are suitable for children over 22 kg and some booster seats are designed to be converted into booster cushions with the removal of the backrest.

Apart from not having a backrest, the main difference between a booster seat and a booster cushion is that they don't have inserts on either side of the seat to fit the seatbelt into. This means that parents need to ensure that the seatbelt is correctly adjusted, and is also worn as tightly as possible.



Travel systems

For parents who are looking for the complete package of products to get their children on the move, a travel system could provide the ideal all-in-one solution.

Travel systems combine a pushchair with a baby car seat, and sometimes a carry cot, which can be removed from the main body of the pushchair and fitted to your car as and when required.

The car seat that comes with your travel system is normally suitable for children up to 13kg, fitting into the rear-facing baby seat category.

Manufacturers' guidelines

In order to give parents a clearer idea of which car seat product is suitable for their needs, manufacturers have divided child car seats into group bands with correlating weights and approximate ages.

However, it is important to note that some car seats fall into a number of bands, and can be adjusted accordingly as your child grows.

These combination seats can be a cost-effective solution for parents.

Group Band	Weight Band	Approx. Age Band
Group 0+	0 -13kg	Birth - 12 months
Group 0+1	0 -18kg	Birth - 4 years
Group 1	9 -18kg	9 months - 4 years
Group 1-2-3	9- 36kg	9 months - 12 years
Group 2-3	15 - 36kg	4 years - 12 years

Fitting car seats

ISOFIX car seats

ISOFIX stands for "International Standards Organisation FIX" and provides a universal standard for fitting car installation that ensures that a child car seat is firmly fixed into place.

ISOFIX child car seats match up to ISOFIX points in a car, so that the child car seat can simply be plugged into place. Although all new cars are not required to have ISOFIX points until November 2014, many cars already have them fitted, and these are normally indicated by ISOFIX tags along your rear seat.

It is important that parents determine if their ISOFIX seats will fit the ISOFIX points in their car model, and manufacturers of ISOFIX seats normally have a fitting guide on their website that will help parents to determine this.

If you are buying another type of seat then it is important to follow the manufacturer's fitting guidelines, and it is important to ensure that your seat is fitted securely and will allow for very little forward or sideways movement.

General fitting guidelines

It is generally safer to fit a child car seat in the rear of a car. However, most can also be fitted in the front if necessary.



Securing your child in place

When fitting a forward-facing car seat in the front of a car it is important that you put the car seat as far back as possible, so that your child is as far away from the dashboard as possible, reducing the chances of injuries to the head or chest in the event of a crash.

Child car seats should always be fixed firmly back into place each time you take your child out of the car, and the position should also be checked each time you place a child into the car.

If your child car seat is fixed into place permanently then its position should still be checked at regular intervals to ensure that it is securely in place.

Fixing seatbelts

Your seatbelt should fit through all the correct guides on the child car seat, and when the seatbelt is in place it is important to ensure that it is secure and has no slack.

If the seatbelt is too short to go around the main route, then check to see if your seat has alternative belt routing that you can use.

Many child car seats also have a lock-off device and it is important to ensure that this is in the 'lock' position so that the seatbelt does not slip through once it is in position.

It is also important to ensure that when you are fitting the seatbelt that the belt buckle does not rest against the child seat frame.

Airbags

When fitting a rear-facing baby seat it is important to keep in mind that these should be positioned in the rear of the car if there is an airbag on the front, passenger-side of the car.

This is because the airbag will have a significant force when activated. When fitting any type of child car seat in the rear of the vehicle it is also important to be aware of side airbags. It is advisable to ask your manufacturer how far these airbags come out so that you can position your child seat accordingly.

If your car has side airbags it is important to ensure that the child restraint does not rest against the door.

What to consider when buying your car seat

- Before selecting a particular brand of car seat it is important to ensure that a car seat fully meets your needs. As well as ensuring a child car seat is appropriate for your child's height and weight, you may also want to check that the brand you choose will sit securely in your car and that your child feels comfortable in the seat.
- If you will be taking your child in and out of the car several times a day then you may want to opt for a more lightweight model, or if you have a small car with not much storage, you may want to consider getting a child car seat as part of a travel system.
- All car seats must be EU-approved, and these will bear a label with a capital 'E' in a circle.
- If you have more than one child, it is important to ensure that each child has the appropriate car seat for their needs.

