



# Choosing a Safe Car Seat

**B**orrowing or using hand-me-downs is a great budget saver. However, when it comes to car seats and cribs, the newer the better in most cases.

## Car Seats—It's the Law

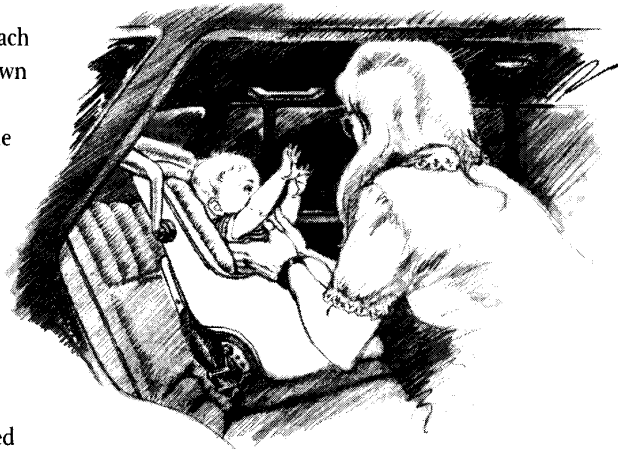
Most states have some sort of child car-safety laws in effect. Each state can approach ticketing and safety belt enforcement its own way. However, the standards that child safety seats follow are federally mandated. Most car seats sold today at least meet the federal safety standards.

## Precautions for Using Older Car Seats

- Avoid using a car seat that was made before January 1981. The label on the car seat lists the date it was manufactured. If the manufacturer's label with the model number and date of manufacture is missing, you may have no way of knowing for sure when it was made.
- Car seats that are more than five years old may be weakened by sun damage.
- Avoid using a car seat that's been in a car crash, even if it looks all right.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions that come with the car seat. If you don't have a copy of the instructions, you can write to the manufacturer to get a replacement copy.
- If the car seat has any visible crack in the frame of the seat or is missing parts, don't use it.
- Write to the manufacturer's address found on the label on the seat to find out if the car seat has been recalled. Include the model number, name of the seat and the date of manufacture.

## Choosing the "Best" New Car Seat

- The best seat is one that fits your car, your baby's size and weight and your budget.
- The price of the seat does not make it the best or the safest.
- Higher prices most often mean added features that may not make the seat safer.
- Try the car seat out. Use your child, a friend's child or a doll. Practice putting the seat in your car and your child in and out of the seat.
- Five-point harnesses provide a better fit.
- Because car seats are constantly being tested against current safety standards, it's important that you send in your registration card to the manufacturer. If there are any problems or recalls, you will be informed directly.



## Safe Car Riding

- Always put your baby in a car seat when in a car.
- Babies are always safest in the back seat.
- Test the car seat to ensure a snug fit by pulling the base to either side or toward the front of the car. There should be no movement.
- Never hold your baby in your lap when you're riding in the car. You won't be able to hang on to her during a crash or sudden stop.
- Infants less than 20 pounds and less than 1 year old must ride in a rear-facing child seat.
- Never put your child in the front seat of a car with air bags. In a crash, the air bag can hurt or kill the baby.
- Children over 20 pounds and older than 1 year old should ride in a car seat that faces the front of the vehicle.
- Keep your child in the forward-facing car seat for as long as she fits comfortably in it.
- Older kids over 40 pounds should ride in a booster seat until the car's lap and shoulder belts fit low and snug on their hips, without the shoulder belt crossing their faces or necks.
- Never put the shoulder belt behind a child's back or under her arm.