

A guide for parents, carers and road safety practitioners

Recommendations

FROM BIRTH – rear facing

Children should use rear facing child restraints for as long as they fit in them. For older restraints which do not have shoulder height markers, the sign of the child having outgrown the restraint is when the child's shoulders are above the top shoulder harness slot for rear facing use.

For restraints with shoulder height markers, the sign of the child having outgrown the restraint is when the child's shoulders are above the upper shoulder height marker for rearward facing restraint use.

Toddler/child – forward facing

Keep each child in the restraint designed for their size as long as they will still fit into it. Don't be in a hurry to move them into the next stage restraint.

Exhaust all options for restraints in the child's 'recommended' category before transitioning them to the next category of restraint.

Why

Rear facing restraints are highly effective in preventing injuries if used correctly, because they fully support the child's head and neck in the event of a crash. This is important as infants have relatively large heads and weak necks which put them at particularly high risk of serious injuries if the head and neck are not supported.

Rearward facing restraints support the child's head and neck in severe frontal crashes better than forward-facing restraints.

Restraints are designed to maximally protect children based on their development and size, with increased protection offered for the earlier years. When buying a restraint, parents should look at the one that allows their child to use it for as long as possible, particularly when the child is taller than average.

When a child exceeds the size limits of one particular model of restraint, there may be other restraints available in that category that accommodate that child's size, which would provide better protection than progressing to the next category of restraint

Child 4 years and older

Once a child has outgrown their forward facing child restraint, they should use a booster seat until they are too tall for the booster or can achieve good seatbelt fit as assessed by the '5 step test' (approximately 145-150cm or up to approximately 12 years of age).

In a crash, booster seats reduce the risk of serious injuries to children too small for adult seat belts, by positioning the belt where it is safest - over the bony areas of the shoulder and pelvis rather than the neck or abdomen. Poor lap belt fit increases the risk of abdominal and head injuries. Poor shoulder belt fit increases the risk of neck injuries.



Quick Reference

1. Rear facing for as long as possible – Rear for a year
2. Keep a child in a full restraint until 4 years plus, exhaust all options before moving to a booster.
3. Booster seats until a child can fit into an adult seat belt (145 cm) or 5 step plan
4. Remember this is a guide and a parent may choose not to take the above advice. The law is the minimum requirement.