

Car crashes are the leading cause of fatal injury for Washington children. Keep your children safe for travel by choosing an appropriate car seat for their age and size.

Read and follow all instruction manuals carefully to ensure that you are adjusting the harnesses properly and installing the car seat correctly in your vehicle.



Every state and country has its own child restraint laws. In the state of Washington, RCW 46.61.687 requires:

- **Vehicle occupants of any age and size must be restrained properly.**
The driver is held responsible for properly securing all passengers under the age of 16.
- **Children under age 13 must ride in the back seat,** whenever practical to do so.
- **Children must ride in an appropriate car safety seat until they reach age 8 or 4'9" tall,** whichever comes first. Car safety seats (i.e. car seats or booster seats) must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Children who have reached age 8 or 4'9" tall may ride in an adult seat belt *if* it fits properly** (see "Seat Belt Readiness Test" on reverse side). If the seat belt cannot be adjusted properly on the child's body, continue to use a car safety seat until it does.

See the back page for more information on choosing a safe car seat.

Do you have questions about traveling safely with children?

Call the Mary Bridge Car Seat Help Line

253.403.1417

BEYOND THE LAW:

What is the BEST I can do to keep my child safe?

Washington state law does not offer specific suggestions for when it is safe to move a child from one type of car seat to the next. National organizations such as Safe Kids, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) provide that much-needed guidance.

This table highlights FIVE STEPS that identify current best practice recommendations. Be advised that each step is a step down – so don't skip a step or rush through them.

<p>STEP 1: Rear-Facing Car Seat (birth to age 2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children up to age two are five times safer in a rear-facing car seat. • Keep your child rear-facing to the weight / height limits of their convertible car seat (30-45 pounds, depending on the model). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant-only car seats fit newborns best and may be rated for infants up to 20-35 lbs. Use a convertible seat next. • Convertible car seats are larger, and most allow rear-facing to 35-45 pounds.
<p>STEP 2: Forward-Facing Car Seat (age 2+)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children over age two (and/or have reached the rear-facing limits of their convertible car seat) should ride in a forward-facing car seat with a 5-point harness as long as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose seats with higher weight and height limits. • Forward-facing seats are often rated to 50-65 pounds. Some are rated up to 80+ pounds.
<p>STEP 3: Booster Seat (up to 4'9" / 8-12 years old)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who have reached the weight or height limit of their forward-facing car seat should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the adult seat belt can fit properly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't rush into a booster seat – a 5-point harness is safer. • Always use booster seats with a lap-and-shoulder seat belt.
<p>STEP 4: Lap-and-Shoulder Seat Belt in the BACK SEAT</p>	<p>Your child can safely ride in an adult seat belt after passing the Seat Belt Readiness Test:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ sits all the way against the vehicle's seat back; AND ✓ knees bend at the edge of the vehicle seat; AND ✓ lap belt fits low across the upper thighs (not up on the belly); AND ✓ shoulder belt crosses between the neck and shoulder; AND ✓ sits comfortably in this position for the entire trip. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no single age / weight / height that can predict proper fit of a seat belt in every vehicle. • Conduct the Seat Belt Readiness Test in every vehicle your child rides in. • If the seat belt does not fit properly, continue using a booster seat until it does.
<p>STEP 5: Lap-and-Shoulder Seat Belt in the FRONT SEAT (age 13+)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children under age 13 should ride in the back seat, whenever possible. • When riding in the front seat, slide the vehicle seat as far back as possible. • Check for airbag warnings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size is not a factor for sitting up front, even "adult-size" kids don't have "adult-strong" bodies. • Pre-teen bodies risk serious or fatal injury in the front seat.