

# Is Your Child Ready for a Seat Belt? Think Again!

**Children need to ride in a booster seat until the seat belt fits right, when they are at least 4 feet, 9 inches tall, about 80 pounds and 8 years old.**



## What is a Booster Seat?

A booster seat is made for older kids when they are too big for a car seat but not big enough for an adult seat belt. A booster seat raises the child up so that both the lap and shoulder parts of the seat belt pass across the child's body in the right places.

## Why Does My Child Need to Ride in a Booster Seat?

Car crashes kill more children 4 to 8 years old than anything else. Seat belts save lives, but a seat belt that doesn't fit correctly won't protect your child in a crash. **Booster seats solve the problem.**

In a crash, a child who is too small for a seat belt can slip out and get hurt or die. Children also can be badly hurt in a crash when the lap part of the seat belt sits up on the tummy, where it can injure internal organs. A shoulder belt worn under the arm can break ribs, and placing the shoulder belt behind the back causes the child to move too far forward causing head trauma.

Many states now have booster seat laws. In Washington State, the law requires booster seats for children 4 to 6 years old or 40 to 60 pounds. Doctors and safety experts advise that children use booster seats until the seat belt fits correctly. In many cases, this will be when they are at least 4'9" tall, about 80 pounds and about 8 years old.

## When Does My Child Need to Use a Booster Seat?

Start to use a booster seat when your child:

- Outgrows his forward-facing car seat with a harness. This happens when his shoulders are above the top set of strap slots or;
- Weighs 40 pounds.

Keep using a booster seat until the seat belt fits the way it should.

## How Do I Know When the Seat Belt Fits My Child?

To see if your child is ready for a seat belt, try this **5-step test**.\*

1. Can your child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do your child's knees bend with ease at the edge of the seat without slouching?
3. Does the lap belt fit snugly across the top of the thighs, not up on the tummy?
4. Does the shoulder belt come across the center of the shoulder and chest?
5. Can your child sit like this for the whole trip?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, or your child puts the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back, a booster seat is needed for a good seat belt fit.

\*Used with permission from SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

**Washington State Booster Seat Coalition**

[www.boosterseat.org](http://www.boosterseat.org)

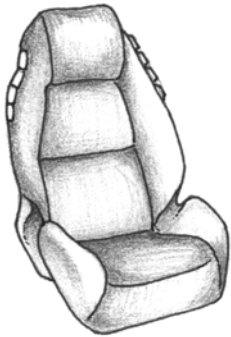
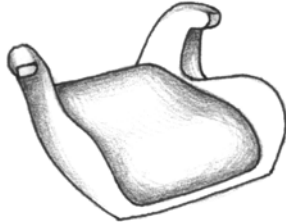
in partnership with

## How Do I Pick the Right Booster Seat?

Booster seats come in many types and styles. Check the label for the weight limits and always follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Booster seats come in a wide range of prices. A higher price may not mean a better or safer booster seat. Here are some guidelines to help you.

### No-back booster:

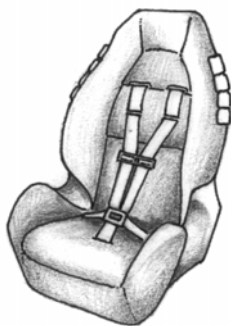
Must be used with a lap/shoulder style seat belt. It is best if your car's seat back or headrests come above your child's ears when she is sitting in the booster seat. This model is easy to pack up and move from car to car.



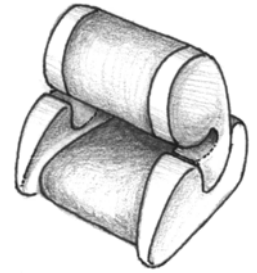
**High-back booster:** Must be used with a lap/shoulder style seat belt. A high-back booster protects against whiplash in cars with low seat backs. It can be used in cars with or without headrests. The high back also supports a sleeping child.

### Forward-facing seat with harness:

Use the harness until your child weighs 40 pounds. Then, remove the harness and use the booster seat with the lap/shoulder style seat belt. This booster seat can be used in cars with or without headrests.



**Shield booster:** Using the shield portion of this booster is no longer advised. If the shield comes off, take it off (check instruction book). Then use the booster seat with the lap/shoulder style seat belt for children over 40 pounds. It works like a no-back booster seat. This style works best in cars with headrests.



## What if My Car Has Only Lap Belts in the Back Seat?

There are many products you can buy to help improve your child's safety in the car if you only have lap belts in the back seat. To learn more about them, or for more information, call (425) 828-8975, 1-800-BUCK-L-UP, or visit [www.boosterseat.org](http://www.boosterseat.org).

## My 6-year-old Says He is a Big Boy Now and None of His Friends Have Booster Seats. What Should I Tell Him?

You know your child best, but here are some ideas:

- It's the law.
- I love you and want to protect you. The seat belt alone is not enough.
- Booster seats are made just for older kids like you.
- You'll be able to see out the window better.
- A booster seat will make the seat belt fit better and be more comfortable.

## Where Can I Get More Information?

- Call the Safety Restraint Coalition at (425) 828-8975 or 1-800-BUCK-L-UP.
- Or visit the Washington State Booster Seat Coalition Web site at [www.boosterseat.org](http://www.boosterseat.org).

Information from: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., Safe Ride News Publications, Safety Restraint Coalition.