



# Child Restraints

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can my child be placed in the front seat of a vehicle?

- A child under the age of 4 years can not be placed in the front seat of a vehicle that has more than one row of seats.
- A child aged between 4 and 7 years may be placed in the front seat if all the back seats are occupied by younger children in approved child restraints.
- A booster seat without a tether strap may be used in the front seat if there is no anchor point available and the child is over 4 years of age.
- If the booster seat has a tether strap it must be attached to an anchor point.
- If your vehicle has only one row of seats then a forward facing child restraint may be placed in the front seat if there is an appropriate anchor point and seat belt available.
- A rearward facing child restraint should not be placed in the front seat where there is an airbag.

### What are the changes to the standard on child restraints?

In February 2010, a new Standard for Child Restraints was released. The Standard specifies design and performance requirements for child restraints in motor vehicles. Some of the major changes include:

- requirements for a new type of booster seat which will accommodate children up to 138 cm in height;
- removing booster cushions from the Standard as they do not offer side impact protection;
- requirements which will apply to all booster seats so that abdominal injury to children will be reduced;
- changes to the way in which child restraints are categorised. They have previously been categorised for use by a child according to their weight. The new Standard will categorise restraints by height and approximate age ranges rather than weight;

- requirements for each restraint to show markings which indicates the maximum height of a child's shoulders for that restraint.
- New requirements that provide for colour coded marking of the seatbelt path on the child restraint.

(Information adapted from Preface to Standard AS/NZS 1754:2010)

### Can I use a second hand restraint?

- If using a second hand child restraint, it is important to know the history of the restraint.
- Second hand restraints should not be used if they have been in a car crash. Even a minor crash can affect the integrity of the child restraint.
- Always check that the straps, webbing and buckles are intact. The restraint should not have cracks or show signs of excessive use or exposure to sunlight.
- Child restraints should not be used if they are over 10 years old. All child restraints should have the date of manufacture printed on them.

### Can I use a child restraint that was bought overseas?

- No. Child restraints must comply with the Australian Standard.
- Restraints bought overseas (other than New Zealand) do not comply with our Standard which is one of the toughest in the world.
- Consumers should be wary of purchasing child restraints from online auction websites or online foreign stores as these may not be compatible with Australian vehicles or meet Australian Standards.

### When should I move my child into an adult seatbelt?

- Your child should move into an adult seat belt when they have outgrown their booster seat and can achieve a correct fit with the adult seatbelt. This is generally when they reach a height of between 140cm to 145cm.
- The sash part of the belt should cross the middle of your child's shoulder and should not go across the neck. The lap part of the belt should sit low across your child's hips and not across the abdomen.



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### What are the different types of child restraints available?

There are a number of different types of child restraints currently available. These are outlined below:

#### Rearward Facing Restraints and Baby Capsules

- Suitable for babies from birth until they are at least 6 months old.
- The baby is secured by an inbuilt six point harness and faces rearward when placed in the restraint.
- The restraint is secured in the vehicle by a tether strap which is attached to an anchor point and the adult seat belt.



#### Convertible Forward Facing Restraints

- These restraints can be used in two positions - rearward facing or forward facing.
- From birth to at least 6 months it can be used in rearward facing position.
- After the child has outgrown this position it can then be converted to a forward facing restraint where the child sits upright and faces forward in the vehicle.
- In both positions the child is secured in the restraint by an inbuilt six point harness.
- It is important to follow manufacturer's instructions when changing between positions or use an authorised restraint fitter.
- These restraints in both positions are secured in the vehicle by the adult seat belt and a tether strap which is attached to an anchor point.



#### Forward Facing Restraints

- These restraints are suitable for children from 6 months at the earliest to at least 4 years of age.
- They have an inbuilt six point harness which is fed through slots in the restraint and allows the harness to be adjusted as the child grows.
- The restraint is held in position by the adult seat belt and a tether strap which is attached to an anchor point in the vehicle.



#### Convertible Booster Seats

- Convertible booster seats can be used for children from 6 months at the earliest to at least 7 years.
- These restraints can be used in two positions:
  1. When the child is small and until at least 4 years of age, it is used as a forward facing restraint with an inbuilt harness to secure the child in the restraint and is attached with a tether strap to an anchor point. The adult seat belt is used to keep it in position on the seat.
  2. When the child has outgrown the harness system, and is at least 4 years old, it can then be converted to a booster seat. The inbuilt harness system is removed and the adult seatbelt is used to restrain the child.

#### Booster Seats

- Booster seats are for children from 4 years of age at the earliest until at least 7. They come with and without top tether straps.
- Booster seats that have a tether strap are heavier and must be attached to an anchor point. The adult seat belt is used to restrain the child in the vehicle.
- Some booster seats have adjustable headrests for growing children.
- Foam booster seats are lighter and do not require a tether strap but still use the adult seat belt to restrain the child.





# Child Restraints

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Is my child required to use an accessory child safety harness with a booster seat?

- The booster seat (for children 4 years to at least 7 years) has been designed to be used with an adult seatbelt.
- The child safety harness is an accessory and is not required to be used with a booster seat.
- The child safety harness offers no better protection than the adult lap/sash seatbelt when used with a booster seat and can reduce the level of protection when misused.\*
- If a child is big enough for a booster seat then they are big enough to use it with the standard adult seat belt.
- An accessory child safety harness is used where there is only a lap seat belt available in the seating position such as the centre rear seat.
- The child safety harness should only be used with a booster seat that incorporates an anti-submarine clip. These clips help to keep the lap seat belt correctly positioned and down low on the child's hips.

\* Accessory child safety harnesses: Do the risks outweigh the benefits? Julie Brown, Derek Wainohu et al. Accident Analysis & Prevention, Volume 42, Issue 1, Jan 2010, pages 112-121.

### I don't understand the different harnesses used with child restraints.

- An inbuilt six point harness forms part of the child restraint. It is incorporated into the design and is attached to the child restraint at six different points on the restraint.
- A child safety harness is an accessory which is purchased separately to a child restraint and should only be used in a seating position that has a lap only seat belt. It attaches to an anchor point in the car and is held in place by a lap only belt.

### What is submarining?

- Submarining occurs in a crash when a child is forced forward and they submarine or slide under the lap belt. This can place the force of the crash onto the child's soft abdomen rather than the pelvic bones.
- Some child restraints incorporate anti-submarining features or devices into their design.



### Can I use a booster cushion?

- Booster cushions that are labelled with the Australian Standards approval sticker 1995 or later are still legal to use.
- However, boosters with a high back and sides are preferred because they:
  - ⇒ offer the child head protection in a side impact crash, and
  - ⇒ support the child when they fall asleep, preventing the child from falling sideways out of the seatbelt as they sleep, and thus keeping the seatbelt in the right place to protect the child.
- The 2010 version of the Australian/New Zealand Standard that governs the performance of child restraints allowed to be sold in Australia (AS/NZS 1754) has removed a special exemption for booster cushions that allowed them to be sold without passing the side impact test.
- Effectively, this means that booster cushions will no longer be able to be certified for sale in Australia and will gradually disappear from retail stores.



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### How do I transport my child safely in a taxi?

- Kidsafe NSW recommends that parents/carers use their own restraint and book a taxi with anchor points.
- Taxi companies have a proportion of their fleet that carry a child restraint. It is essential that the taxi be booked well in advance to ensure that an appropriate vehicle is available, and that it has an appropriate seat for the day of travel.
- If arriving at an airport without pre-booking a taxi with a child restraint, seek out a 'Taxi Commissionaire' who can be identified by their yellow jackets. One of their roles is to assist customers with an appropriate taxi.
- If a taxi is not booked with a child restraint and/or there is not one available, a child can travel in the taxi using an adult seatbelt. Kidsafe NSW however does not recommend any child under 7 years of age travel in an adult seatbelt in any vehicle.
- All children younger than 12 months must be secured in a child restraint.

### How do I fit three child restraints in the back seat of my vehicle?

- Fitting three restraints in the rear of a sedan can be difficult depending on the make and model of your vehicle. You may need to investigate the range of restraints available.
- There are a number of booster seats with a narrow base on the market which may be suitable if your child is over 4 years.
- Manufacturers recognise the need for child restraints with narrower seats and constantly redesign and develop new child restraints to meet Australian Standards.

### How can I stop my child getting their arms out of the restraint?

- Children learn by modelling the behaviour of others so always make sure you wear your own seatbelt.
- Be consistent and persistent with your child about correctly wearing a child restraint on every trip.

- Check that the restraint is suitable for your child, fits comfortably with no twists in the straps, and the inbuilt harness is adjusted firmly on your child.
- Devices are available which may limit the child's ability to get arms and torso out of the shoulder straps.

### Can I still use the third row auxiliary seats (dickie seats) for my child and do I need to use a child restraint?

- Children may still use a dickie seat if the category is suitable and rated for their size and/or age.
- If a dickie seat is rated for adult use then a child restraint must be used.
- Depending on the category of the dickie seat, you may be able to use the seat and seatbelt without a child restraint.
- You will need to read the vehicle manufacturer's instructions to check if the dickie seat will accommodate a child restraint.

### How can I find out which child restraint is the most suitable for my child?

- In Australia, any child restraint sold must comply with the Australian Standard AS/NZ 1754. The Child Restraint Evaluation Program (CREP) tests and assesses child restraints which have been approved under the Standard.
- Child Restraint Safety Ratings—your guide to buying a child restraint brochure provides guidelines for consumers when purchasing a child restraint. A copy of the brochure is available for download at: [www.kidsafensw.org](http://www.kidsafensw.org) or [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)

### How do I know if my child restraint is fitted correctly?

- Always read the manufacturer's instructions if you are fitting the child restraint into your vehicle.
- If you are unsure of how to correctly fit a child restraint then contact an authorised restraint fitter. For further details contact NSW Roads and Maritime Services on 13 22 13.

For further information contact Kidsafe NSW on 02 9845 0890 or visit [kidsafensw.org](http://kidsafensw.org) or [rta.nsw.gov.au](http://rta.nsw.gov.au) Updated Feb 2012

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