Infant, convertible, or booster seat? Finding the right car seat and installing it correctly is no easy task. Then there’s the question of when to transition your child to another type of car seat. Follow these guidelines from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to help you through the decision-making process and keep your child safe.

- Select a car seat based on your child’s age and size, and choose a seat that fits in your vehicle and use it every time.
- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer’s instructions (check height and weight limits) and read the vehicle owner’s manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or lower anchors and a tether, if available.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer’s height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.

**Types of car seats include:**

**Rear-Facing Car Seat** is the best seat for your young child to use. will have a harness and in a crash cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child’s fragile neck and spinal cord. Types including Infant Car Seat (Rear-Facing only), Convertible Seat, or All-in-One Seat.

**Forward-Facing Car Seat** has a harness and tether that limits your child’s forward movement during a crash. Types include Convertible Seat, Combination Seat, All-in-One Seat.

**Booster Seat** positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child’s body. Types include Booster Seat with high back, Backless Booster Seat, Combination Seat, All-in-One Seat.

**Seat Belt** should like across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain your child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck or face.
Follow these recommendations for selecting a car seat based on your child’s age and size.

Birth – 12 Months

Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats:

- Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing.
- Convertible and All-in-one car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.

1 – 3 Years

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It’s the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat’s manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether.

4 – 7 Years

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat’s manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it’s time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

8 – 12 Years

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it’s safer there.

For more information on car seats, visit the Parents Central link on NHTSA.gov.

Information courtesy of NHTSA.gov