

Choosing the right car seat for your children

Choosing the right car or booster seat for your child is so important, you must ensure they are safe and secure at all times and that the type of seat you choose, meets with current guidelines.

The general rule is that children under 12 must use a child seat or suitable booster seat, and that children 12 years and older or 135 centimetres tall, whichever comes first, must wear a seat belt.

Child car seats are designed to protect at each stage of development. As your child grows you should replace your car seat to meet either their height or weight requirements.

When you are deciding on a baby seat you have a choice either to buy one as part of a travel system or as a stand alone purchase. You will need to know whether it can be secured by Isofix connectors that are found at the base of the rear seats, the car seat belt or fix on to a base.

If your vehicle was registered after 2001 it will have Isofix connectors and if you opt for a base unit this will stay in the car and the seat will click into place.

There is a vast array of styles available to suit all budgets, you can even now buy a seat that will swivel on a rotating base which will help you to fit your child into place without reaching into the vehicle completely. Other configurations allow the seat to tip so that the child can sleep in a better position.

The choice of seat depends on your child's height and weight at any given time. Height-based seats are known as 'i-Size' seats - a regulation that was introduced in 2013.

Regulations stipulate that a child must be rear-

facing seat until they are 15 months old, after that they can use a forward-facing child car seat or booster as they grow. If you are placing your baby in the front of the vehicle in a rear facing seat it is vitally important to deactivate any front airbags.

All car seats should be EU approved – look for the 'E' mark label on the seat and 'R129' that tells you it is an i-Size seat. The weight of your child is categorised into groups ranging from Group 0 for children weighing from 0kg to 10kg - up to Group 3 for children with a weight range of between 22kg to 36kg.

The table opposite shows this in more detail. All parents sometimes find themselves in certain situations where the use of an appropriate seat is not available. This could be a taxi or mini-cab, on a minibus or coach or where there isn't sufficient space for an additional car seat. In these circumstances a child aged 3 or older can travel in a back seat without a child car seat and without a seat belt, children over 3 must sit in their own space and wear an adult seat belt.

When choosing your car seat the best advice is not to be tempted to buy one second hand. It could have been damaged in an accident, might not be complete with all its parts and could be missing important safety and fitting instructions. Buy the best car seat that your budget will allow and make sure it is secured at all times.

It is also important to make sure your child straps are fitted correctly and sufficiently tightened. If they are too loose, the child will wiggle their arms out and lean forward - we have all been there. The straps usually tighten from under the base of the seat, it should have a fastening that your child is not able to release themselves.



Classification of groups by weight and recommended car seat

Weight	Group	Type of Seat
0kg to 10kg	0	Lie-flat or 'lateral' baby carrier, rear-facing baby carrier, or rear-facing baby seat using a harness
0kg to 13kg	0+	Rear-facing baby carrier or rear-facing baby seat using a harness
9kg to 18kg	1	Rear- or forward-facing baby seat using a harness or safety shield
15kg to 25kg	2	Rear- or forward-facing child car seat (high-backed booster seat or booster cushion) using a seat belt, harness or safety shield
22kg to 36kg	3	Rear- or forward-facing child car seat (high-backed booster seat or booster cushion) using a seat belt, harness or safety shield