



# Carrying babies safely in cars: guidance for practitioners who support expectant and new parents



Produced with the support of the  
Department for Transport



child accident  
prevention trust

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTITIONERS

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# Introduction

Becoming a parent for the first time can be a stressful time. Expectant and new parents will turn to the professionals around them, and to their friends and family, for advice on many subjects. Carrying their new baby in the car is just one of the topics on which they will often seek advice.

This short guide has been written to help practitioners who support expectant and new parents to learn more about carrying babies safely in cars. Midwives, health visitors and those who work with them are respected advisers in the eyes of parents, and they are the principal audiences for this guide. However, it will also be valuable to others in positions to give advice to expectant and new parents, including people running ante-natal classes, childminders and family support staff.

Although written for a non-specialist audience, the guide may also act as a useful quick reference guide for local authority road safety officers, in their work with practitioners who support expectant and new parents.

The guide starts by explaining why it is important for babies to be carried safely in cars. It then provides advice on five key issues of interest to first-time parents, looking in turn at:

- why babies need special seats
- choosing the right baby seat
- fitting the baby seat correctly
- securing the baby in the baby seat
- using the baby seat in the home

The guide sets out the key messages for practitioners to give to expectant and new parents, and answers the questions most frequently posed by first-time parents.

While the guide is intended for practitioners who support parents of new-born babies, it also provides advice on when to move an older baby to a forward-facing child seat – recognising that parents will continue to look to a trusted professional for advice.

The guide also provides an outline of the law and ideas for what can be done within a hospital setting to make things easier for new parents. It also suggests where to turn for help locally and where to find further information on the web.

The development of the guide was supported by a grant from the Department for Transport.

# A word of warning

If a parent ever asks you a question about carrying babies safely in cars to which you do not know the answer, do not guess. Give the parent as much information as you are confident about, and then either point them towards specialist sources of information, or get back to them when you have found the definitive answer. The safety implications of giving a wrong answer could be very serious.

This guide will not teach you to check or fit seats – this requires specialist training that the Child Accident Prevention Trust and others can provide.

# Why are baby seats so important?

A baby who is correctly secured in a baby seat in a car is 90% less likely to be killed in a crash, 75% less likely to be seriously injured and 67% less likely to be slightly injured.

If you have an accident at just 30mph, a baby who is not properly secured in a baby seat will collide with something in the car – the seat, the door, the dashboard – with the same force as hitting the ground after falling from a fourth floor window. At 60mph, it's the equivalent of the baby falling from the twelfth floor.

## How many babies are hurt in car crashes?

The number of babies killed or injured in cars has been steadily declining over recent years. Improved car design, advances in medical treatment and the increased use of baby seats have all contributed to this fall. However, despite this, a handful of babies are killed in cars each year and well over 100 are injured, some seriously.

## How do baby seats protect babies?

In a car crash, when the car stops, any passengers who are not properly strapped in – babies, children and adults – keep moving until they hit something in the car that stops them. If a baby is in a baby seat, it will control and stop the forward motion, and help prevent serious injury.

## The importance of correct use

Although most babies are carried in baby seats, many seats are not used correctly. This limits their effectiveness and puts babies at risk of serious injury in crashes where they should be well protected.

While some babies recover from the injuries they suffer, others will be left with long-term disabilities. This can lead to time off work for parents, costs for continuing hospital visits and for long-term care, harm to a child's education when they are older, and family breakdowns.

## Where do most accidents happen?

The majority of car accidents happen within a few miles of home and at speeds lower than 30mph, simply because these are the car journeys we make most frequently – to the shops, school, relatives. The message is clear – everyone travelling in the car must be properly strapped in on every trip, no matter how short.

### Key messages for parents

- Never carry a baby on your lap or in your arms.
- Use a baby seat on every journey you make, no matter how short. Most accidents happen within a short distance of home.

## Frequently asked questions

### **Surely my baby is safe if I sit her on my lap and hold her tightly?**

Absolutely not. However tight your grip and good your intentions, you will not be able to hold on to your baby, even in a low-speed crash. In a 30mph crash, holding on to even a small baby needs the same strength as lifting eight bags of cement at the same time. You would also be breaking the law as a baby must be carried in a baby seat in any car, van or other goods vehicle.

### **Can I carry my baby in its baby carrier (sling) with the seat belt around me?**

No. A baby carrier is not designed to withstand the forces that are exerted in car crashes. The baby carrier will tear apart and the baby could well be thrown out of the car. You would also be breaking the law as a baby carrier is not an approved baby seat.

### **Can I put the seat belt around my baby and myself?**

No. In a crash, the baby will act as a cushion between you and the seat belt. This means you will squash your baby and probably injure it very seriously.

# Why babies need special seats

Young babies have physical characteristics that mean that they need special designs of child car seats to protect them. Specifically they need:

- seats that face the back of the car
- seats that carry the baby in a semi-reclined position
- seats with a harness to hold the baby in place.

## Seats that face the back of the car

A young baby has a very large head compared with the rest of its body, plus a neck that is too weak to support its head. (This is why, when you carry a young baby in your arms, you support the baby's head to reduce the strain on the baby's neck).

In a crash, the baby's head has to be supported to minimise the stress on its neck. If a baby was facing the front of the car in a head-on collision – the most common type of car crash – its head would be thrown forward while its body would be held securely by the harness, putting huge amounts of stress on its neck. This is why new babies must be carried in a baby seat that faces the back of the car.

## Seats that carry the baby in a semi-reclined position

As a young baby's neck is too weak to support its head, the baby cannot be carried sitting upright – in normal conditions, the head would simply fall forwards on to the baby's chest.

If the baby was carried lying flat, with its head towards the front of the car, in a head-on collision the baby's body would be held securely by the harness that passes over its shoulders. However, the baby's head would try to move towards the front of the car and again the baby's neck would be put under enormous stress.

There are products on the market that allow the baby to be carried lying flat across the back seat of a car. These are sometimes called 'car beds'. These seats are necessary for a very small proportion of babies – often those who have a medical condition such as postural apnoea that requires them to be carried flat rather than semi-reclined. They should be used only when medical advice dictates that a baby needs to be carried lying flat.

## Having a harness to hold the baby in place

The harness is needed to make sure that the baby is kept in the seat and inside the car in a crash. If there was no harness, there would be a significant risk of the baby being thrown about inside the car or even thrown out of the car completely. This increases the risk of the baby being killed or seriously injured considerably.

The harness passes over some of the strongest parts of the baby's body – its shoulder girdle and rib cage. This ensures that, in a crash, any forces from the harness itself are spread across these bony structures rather than being transmitted directly to the delicate internal organs inside the chest and abdomen – organs that can be easily damaged.

### Key messages for parents

Babies need special designs of child car seats to protect them:

- seats that face the back of the car
- seats that carry the baby in a semi-reclined position
- seats with a harness to hold the baby in place.

# Choosing the right baby seat

Choosing the right seat can be a confusing business for a new parents. There is no single right answer to the question 'What type of baby seat should I buy?' but there are wrong answers.

**The key point to remember is to get a baby seat that fits the car correctly and is easy to use. Not every baby seat will fit properly in every car.**

This section looks in turn at:

- buying the seat before the baby leaves hospital
- trying before you buy
- understanding how child car seats are classified
- two-way, convertible or combination seats
- the ISOFIX system
- second-hand seats
- standards and regulations.

## Buy the seat before the baby leaves hospital

A baby needs to be carried safely from its first journey home from hospital. This means parents should buy the seat before the mother and baby are discharged from hospital.

## Try before you buy

Getting ready for a new baby can be a very busy time and it is easy to see how first-time parents may be tempted to buy off the shelf. If you can, try to discourage expectant parents from buying a baby seat without trying it in their car first – there is a strong possibility that the baby seat will not fit securely, limiting its effectiveness in a crash, or that it will be difficult to use, discouraging parents from using it on short journeys.

If a first-time parent asks your advice on what to look for, when they try out the baby seat, you can advise them that:

- If they follow all the instructions but cannot fit the baby seat into their car, it probably means they have got the wrong seat for their car and should try another seat.
- If, when they do fit the seat, it wobbles, again it probably means they have got the wrong seat for their car and should try another seat. The seat should be secure.

- They should test that the baby seat fits in the back of their car – it is generally safer for a baby to travel in the back seat of the car if possible.
- They should test how easy the baby seat is to fit and remove – if it is awkward to use, they may be tempted not to bother with it on short journeys.

Our advice is that if the shop will not allow the parent to try the seat in the car before they buy it, the parent should go to another shop that will. Reputable retailers appreciate that not every baby seat fits properly in every car and that it is important for parents to try before they buy. You may be able to build up local knowledge about retailers who offer this service.

If there is no shop locally that offers this service, you could encourage parents to ask if the shop will take the seat back if, when they get it home, they are not satisfied with the way it fits or its ease of use.

If the grandparents want to give the new parents a new baby seat, it is best to encourage them to allow the parents to go out and buy it, as it needs to suit their car.


## Understanding how child car seats are classified

Baby seats are classified by the weight of the baby that they are designed to carry. The weight determines which baby seat 'Group' is right for the baby.

It is the weight of the baby, not its age, that matters when talking about baby seats – age is often quoted but it is just for guidance. The table below shows the links between the weight of the baby, the Group and the approximate age of the baby:

Baby's weight	Group	Approximate maximum age
Birth to 10 kg (22 lbs)	0 (zero)	8-9 months
Birth to 13 kg (29 lbs)	0+ (zero plus)	15 months *

\* Although a typical 13 kg child is much older than 15 months – usually nearer two years – the size of baby seats is such that they can usually only accommodate babies up to about 15 months. They are too short and narrow for older children.



Seats for children who are physically mature enough to be carried facing the front of the car are described as Group 1, 2 or 3 seats. More about when to move from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat later.

## Two-way, convertible or combination seats

Some seats cover more than one Group. These seats can be adapted to face forwards when the child is capable of being carried forward-facing safely. These are known as two-way, convertible or combination seats. They have pros and cons.

On the plus side:

- It may be cheaper to buy just one seat to go from birth to about four years.
- The seat tends to be bigger, which means the baby can face the back of the car for longer – and because of the weakness of babies' necks, babies should be carried facing the back of the car for as long as possible, to minimise the risk of serious neck injury.

On the minus side:

- The seat is much heavier, so it is difficult to carry a seat with a sleeping baby in it to and from the car.
- The seat may not be designed to use in the home.
- The seat tends to be more difficult to fit into the car because of its size and the way the adult seat belt is threaded through it.
- As you may have to make adjustments to the seat, when you change from using the seat rear-facing to forward-facing, there is a chance of getting the adjustments wrong and compromising the effectiveness of the seat.

In addition, because the seats are large, small babies may look out of place in the bottom of the seat, although this is not a real safety issue.

## The ISOFIX system

Most baby seats are held into the car with the adult seat belts. However, some seats use a system called ISOFIX. With ISOFIX, there are fittings on the baby seat and fittings in the car. These fittings allow the seat to be 'plugged into' the car so that the adult seat belt does not need to be used. ISOFIX is meant to make it easier to fit a seat in a car, which improves the reliability and hence the safety of the seat. The seat will usually feel more

secure when installed in the car.

If parents have ISOFIX attachments in their car – the handbook will tell them – they should look seriously at getting a baby seat with the ISOFIX system. Even if they have one car without ISOFIX and another with the ISOFIX fittings, they will still be able to use an ISOFIX seat in the car without the ISOFIX fittings by using the adult seat belt.

## Second-hand seats

For a baby seat to work correctly in a crash, it needs to be undamaged, complete and correctly used. Although money is often tight as first-time parents prepare for their new arrival, do your best to dissuade them from buying a second-hand baby seat.

This is because it can never be guaranteed that a used seat bought through a car boot sale or small ad has not been in a crash or that some vital part is not missing, especially if it does not have its instruction book. Our advice is simple: **do not buy a second-hand seat.**

It may be safe to accept a baby seat that is offered by a friend or family member – but only if the parent knows its history and can be certain that it has not been involved in an accident.

Even in a low-speed accident, a baby seat is subjected to immense stresses and strains. Although the seat may look perfect, it could have sustained damage that is invisible to the naked eye, such as hairline cracks in the shell, stretching to the harness webbing or damage to the buckles. If the seat has been involved in an accident, it is best for the parent to say no to the offer, as the seat may not keep the baby safe.

If the seat has not been involved in an accident, the parent should make sure that the seat is complete with all its parts and fitting instructions. They should be aware that older seats may not have the same safety features as new ones and may not be as easy to fit.

## Standards and regulations

Almost all baby seats sold in the UK comply with an international regulation known as ECE Regulation 44 (sometimes called Reg 44 or R44). This is developed by a United Nations committee on which the UK government is represented.

There are no British Standards for new baby seats. Seats complying with the now obsolete British Standards (BS AU 202 and BS AU 202a) will be several years old and may not offer the same protection as current designs of seats that meet the latest revision of the international regulation.



## Key messages for parents

- Buy a baby seat before your baby is born, so your baby is safe from their very first trip home from hospital.
- Take your car with you when you go to buy the baby seat, so that you can try before you buy. Not every seat will fit properly in every car.
- Buy a baby seat that you can easily fit into your car and that fits securely into your car.
- Do not buy a baby seat that is difficult to fit. If it is awkward you may be tempted not to bother with it on short journeys.

## Frequently asked questions

### **Can you recommend a particular make of baby car seat?**

Not really. All new baby car seats sold in the UK comply with the relevant international regulation, so from a safety point of view all new seats offer similar levels of protection. What is important is to pick a baby seat that suits you. It should fit your car correctly, and be easy and convenient for you to use. Remember to try before you buy and look at the pluses and minuses of each seat.

### **I've been offered a second-hand seat – do you have any advice?**

Treat a second-hand seat with caution. If the seat has been involved in an accident of any sort – even at low speeds – it may have sustained invisible damage that has weakened the structure and will make the seat less effective in a crash. If you don't know the exact history of the seat or don't have the instructions that go with it, you are advised to leave it well alone.

# Fitting baby seats

Fitting the baby seat incorrectly is one of the main factors reducing the effectiveness of the seat in a crash. This guide cannot teach you how to fit a baby seat correctly, nor how to correct fitting problems, but it can help you answer some of the questions parents may ask about fitting and direct parents towards sources of specialist advice.

This section looks in turn at:

- which way the seat should face
- where to fit a baby seat
- seats with airbags
- where to go for help in tackling fitting problems.

## Facing backwards, not forwards

Occasionally people install a baby seat in completely the wrong way, with the seat facing forwards not backwards (so that the baby is facing the front of the car, not the back). This means the baby seat will provide little or no protection in a crash. If you spot a parent who has done this, advise them to correct the error as quickly as possible.

## Where to fit a baby seat

The back seat of the car is the safer place to fit a baby seat, as the most common type of car crash is a head-on collision.

The centre back seat of the car is the safest place to fit a baby seat, as it is also furthest from the sides of the car, in case the car is hit from the side. However, it may not be possible to fit a baby seat there, if the centre rear seat just has a lap belt. Unless the manufacturer's instructions advise to the contrary, baby seats cannot be used with just a lap belt

If the front passenger seat of the car has an airbag that is switched on, it is **vital** to put a baby seat in the back of the car.

Remembering the rule about airbags, baby seats with the ISOFIX system can be used wherever there are corresponding ISOFIX fittings in the car.

## Seats with airbags

**A rear-facing baby seat must NEVER be used on the front seat of a car where a passenger airbag is fitted, unless the airbag has been switched off, either manually or automatically.** The importance of this rule cannot be stressed too much, as failure to comply with it can lead to the baby being killed.

This is because, in a crash, the airbag inflates extremely quickly, with an explosive force. A baby seat on the front passenger seat is very close to the dashboard where the airbag is stowed. The force of the airbag inflating will smash into the back of the baby seat and throw the seat and the baby violently into the air.

In some cars, the driver can switch off the front passenger airbag manually. But if the driver forgets to switch the airbag back on again, it will not be there to provide extra protection to the next passenger. The only safe option is not to fit a baby seat on a front passenger seat protected by an airbag.

Airbags at the side of the seat, which are designed to protect passengers in side crashes, do not pose a problem for baby seats because they do not intrude into the passenger compartment as much as airbags in front of the seat.



## Tackling fitting problems

If a parent tells you that they are having problems fitting the seat, or that the seat moves sideways or forwards a lot when they pull on it, you can advise them to:

- Have another go at fitting the seat, following the manufacturer's instructions from start to finish – unfortunately there are no short-cuts in fitting a seat.
- Contact the retailer they bought the seat from to see if they can help. If the parent bought the seat without trying it in their car first, there is a chance that the seat may not be compatible with their car and they may need to ask to exchange it for another one.
- Phone the baby seat manufacturer, who may be able to point them to a local retailer or other specialist who can help. Some manufacturers have telephone helplines – the phone number may be in the seat's instruction booklet.
- Phone their local council's road safety officer, who may also be able to assist. Some offer a baby seat checking service or will be able to point the parent to somewhere locally that can help. Or they may just be able to answer the parent's question.

In addition, your local council's road safety officer may be organising a check of child car seats – many do this during Child Safety Week. You can contact your local road safety officer at your town hall, county hall or, in Scotland, through the police. You can also find your local road safety team through the contacts section of the Local Authorities Road Safety Officers Association website <http://www.larsoa.org.uk>.

### Key messages for parents

- It is safer to fit a baby seat on the back seat of the car, as the most common type of car crash is a head-on collision.
- NEVER place a rear-facing baby seat on the front seat of a car where a passenger airbag is fitted, if the airbag is switched on.
- Even if you can turn the airbag off, it is still a good idea to carry the baby in the back seat.

## Frequently asked questions

### Where is the safest place in the car for a baby to travel?

Legally, a baby can travel in any of the passenger seats, front or back, as long as they are correctly restrained. However, the back seat is the safer place to be – specifically the centre seat, although it may not be possible to fix a baby seat there. If the front passenger seat has an airbag that is switched on, it is **vital** that the baby seat is only put in the back of the car.

### What's the problem with airbags?

Airbags are a safety feature that offer extra protection to passengers wearing seat belts. However, in a crash, an airbag in the dashboard can cause huge damage to a rear-facing baby seat on the front passenger seat. This is because the airbag will inflate explosively, hitting the back of the baby seat and throwing the baby seat and the baby violently into the air.

While some passenger airbags can be switched off, the danger is that the driver will forget to switch the airbag back on again, depriving passengers of the protection the airbag provides. The only safe option is not to put baby seats on front passenger seats protected by airbags.

# Securing the baby in the baby seat

It is just as important to secure the baby in the seat correctly as it is to install the seat in the car properly. Again, following the manufacturer's instructions from start to finish is essential.

This guide cannot teach you how to secure a baby in a baby seat correctly but it can help you understand how the harness protects the baby, and some basic principles of securing babies in seats, to help you answer some of the questions parents may pose. It also touches on when to secure the baby in the seat and on carrying very small babies.

## Understanding how the harness works

The harness is adjustable in a number of ways. In most baby seats, there are slots in the part of the seat that the baby lies on, through which the harness passes. These allow the harness to be positioned so that it emerges from the seat back just above the baby's shoulders.

If you could not adjust the position of the shoulder straps, there could be a gap between the baby's shoulders and the straps. The baby could then slip out of the shoulder harness and would not be properly protected. Also, in a crash, the baby could start to slide violently in the baby seat and then be stopped suddenly by the straps, putting unacceptable forces into the baby's body.

The length of the harness can also be adjusted to ensure that the straps are close to the baby's body. If they are too slack, there is an increased risk of the baby slipping out in a crash. It is important to adjust both the position and the tightness of the straps correctly.

## Basic principles

Different seats require users to secure babies differently but the principles are the same for all baby seats:

- The harness should pass through the correct slots at the baby's shoulder level.
- When the harness is tightened, it should be comfortable but firm – you should be able to insert two flat fingers between the shoulder straps and the baby's chest.
- The harness should not be twisted.
- The harness should be adjusted so that it fits the baby correctly – babies can vary in size depending on the clothing they are wearing.
- The button that you press to undo the harness must be facing outwards.

## Common problems

The harness is the main cause of problems:

- If the harness is left undone, this is a potentially catastrophic failure putting the baby's life at risk.
- If the harness is too slack, the baby's body will be subjected to greater stress in a crash increasing the risk of injury. It can also increase the risk of the baby being thrown from the seat in a crash.
- If the harness is threaded through the wrong slots near the baby's shoulders, this will have the same effect as the harness being too slack.
- If the harness is twisted, there will be more stress on that part of the baby's body where the harness is twisted, increasing the risk of injury. In addition, the button on the release buckle may be against the baby rather than facing away from its body, making it less accessible and so harder to undo in an emergency.

## When to secure the baby in the seat

The baby can be secured in the baby seat before the seat is placed in the car or when the seat is already in the car. It is often easier to do it before taking the seat out to the car, as access to the seat can be tricky, especially in a two or three door car when the baby seat is to go into the back seat.

## Carrying very small babies

Tiny babies can look very uncomfortable when placed in a baby seat, as they collapse into a heap in the bottom of the seat. Despite this, they will still be protected effectively in a crash and will be a lot safer than being carried on a passenger's lap.

They are unlikely to suffer any physical consequences from riding in a baby seat as they will not normally be in it for any length of time.



## Key messages for parents

- Read the instructions from beginning to end before you try to secure your baby in the car seat for the first time. Follow the instructions – there are no shortcuts in using baby seats.
- Remember to check that the baby seat is securely fitted every time you use it. Straps can work loose.
- The harness that secures the baby in place needs to be adjusted as the baby grows, and when the baby is wearing light or heavy clothes. A slack harness will mean that your baby is not ideally protected.

## Frequently asked questions

### **I have a small baby. Can I use a rolled-up towel under my baby to make him/her more comfortable?**

We would not recommend this. The problem is that, in a crash, the towel may slip out so the harness becomes slack. This could mean that the baby is less well protected than they should be. If the baby seat manufacturer sells an accessory to make the baby more comfortable, then this is OK to use.

# Using baby seats in the home

If the baby is asleep when a journey is completed, it is normal to carry the seat, with the baby in it, into the home rather than wake the baby. However, baby seats are not designed for babies to sleep in for prolonged periods of time, such as overnight. On a long journey, the baby will need to be removed every hour or two for nappy changing or feeding, so they will not be in the seat continuously.

The same rules apply to using the baby seat in the home as to other items of nursery equipment. For example, a baby seat should not be placed on a raised surface as the baby's fidgeting may move the seat and result in a fall. Also, the seat should not be placed near a fire in case the fabric ignites. And the seat is not a toy for toddlers to jump on or sit in – this could damage the seat, so that it does not protect the baby properly in a crash.

## Key messages for parents

- Baby seats are designed to keep babies safe in car crashes. While babies inevitably fall asleep in them, and are often left in the seat until they wake, they are not designed for babies to sleep in for long periods such as overnight.
- Do not place the baby seat on a raised surface in case the baby wriggles and the seat and baby fall to the ground.

# Moving a baby from a rear-facing baby seat to a forward-facing child seat

It is safest for a baby to travel facing the back of the car for as long as possible, ideally for at least a year. This is because a baby's head is large in comparison to the rest of their body, while their neck is weak, and a crash in a forward-facing child seat can seriously injure a baby's weak neck.

For this reason, parents should be encouraged to leave their baby in a rear-facing baby seat for as long as possible. When their baby exceeds the weight limit for the baby seat (10 kg or 13 kg, depending on the type of seat), they will need to move it to a forward-facing seat.

As a rough guide, a baby has to be able to sit up unaided for a prolonged period before it can safely be moved to a forward-facing seat. This indicates that its neck is strong enough to support its head. Having said this, parents should not be tempted to move the baby to a forward-facing seat if the baby can sit unaided for long periods but it does not exceed the weight limit for the baby seat – it is still safer for the baby in a rear-facing seat.

If the baby is very heavy, it may still be too physically immature to move to a forward-facing seat even though it exceeds the 10 kg weight limit for the seat. In this case, parents can either use a

rear-facing baby seat that goes up to 13 kg or use a two-way (combination or convertible) seat that is large enough to accommodate older children as well as babies.

If the baby is long but still under the weight limit of the seat, parents should keep the baby facing the back of the car in that seat. You can reassure them that they should not worry if the baby's legs are a bit bunched up, or of the baby's feet are pressing against the adult seat back, as this is not a safety issue and will not harm their normal development.

## Key messages for parents

- Because of the weakness of babies' necks, they should be carried facing the rear of the car for as long as possible, to minimise the risk of serious neck injury.

# Helping parents – advice for staff in hospitals

Here are some suggestions on what staff who work in a hospital setting can do to make things easier for expectant and new parents, and to encourage parents to carry babies safely in cars.

## Seats on loan

Some parents will not have time to purchase the baby seat, especially if the baby arrives unexpectedly! Some hospitals keep a small stock of baby seats to lend to parents for the first journey. Although we advise that parents need to get the right baby seat for their car, any seat is better than none – and it means they will not be breaking the law.

If you link up with the road safety department of your local council, they may be able to check the seats when they are returned, to make sure they are not damaged and are still complete.

## Taxi companies

Many parents travel home from hospital by taxi because they do not own a car. These parents do not need to buy a baby seat. Taxi companies that provide baby seats on request should be on a hospital's 'approved' list that can be given to parents.

## Hospital policy

If you are able to do more work on this issue, you may be able to develop a hospital policy that covers:

- Giving advice to expectant and new parents on baby seats
- Having a baby seat on the ward and encouraging new parents to practise putting the baby into the seat on the ward.
- Only promoting taxi companies that provide baby seats on request.

Local authority road safety officers may be happy to collaborate with hospital staff to provide training on in-car safety and run to events such as car seat checking days. They can also be a good source of leaflets to give to new parents.

You can contact your local road safety officer at your town hall, county hall or, in Scotland, through the police. You can also find your local road safety team through the contacts section of the Local Authorities Road Safety Officers Association website <http://www.larsoa.org.uk>

# The law



This section has been placed at the end because, in some ways, it is the least important part of keeping babies safe in cars. By using a baby seat correctly on every journey, parents will be keeping their baby safe and should be fulfilling the requirements of the law. This section is not a definitive description of the law.

The law requires children under three to use a baby seat or child seat appropriate for their weight in any vehicle, including vans, campers and other goods vehicles.

In a taxi, if an appropriate restraint is not available, a child under three may travel in the rear seat unrestrained. (The adult seat belt is not a safe option for this age group and travelling without a baby seat is also unsafe.)

There is no exemption for children under three to travel unrestrained in vehicles with no seat belts in the rear, such as classic cars, vans or campers. Children under three must use the correct baby seat or child seat, so they would need to travel in the front in the correct child restraint.

Rear-facing baby seats **MUST NOT** be used in a seat protected by a frontal air-bag unless the air-bag has been deactivated manually or automatically.

The driver is responsible for ensuring that a baby is properly restrained. The penalty for non-compliance is a £30 fixed penalty notice. If a case goes to court, the maximum fine is £500.

# Sources of further information

Information sources change frequently. Keep in touch with your local council's road safety officers as they will be aware of significant changes. They can be contacted at your town hall, county hall or, in Scotland, through the police.

**Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT)** – this national charity is committed to reducing the number of children and young people killed, disabled and seriously injured as a result of accidents. CAPT can provide hands-on training on in-car safety tailored to the needs of the audience, resources on a range of topics and expert advice. Visit <http://www.capt.org.uk> for more information.

**Department for Transport** – the department maintains the Think! website <http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk>. This provides access to advice and information for parents, children of different ages, teachers, and others.

**Local Authorities Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA)** – the association's website <http://www.larsoa.org.uk> is an excellent way of keeping up-to-date with the latest road safety news. It also provides contact details for road safety officers.

**Road Safety Scotland** – funded by the Scottish Executive, its remit is to develop and co-ordinate Scotland's road safety initiatives and campaigns. Its website is at <http://www.roadsafetyscotland.org.uk/>.

<http://www.childcarseats.org.uk> – a comprehensive **RoSPA** website on child car seats. It also provides contact details for road safety officers, seat manufacturers and others.

# About the Child Accident Prevention Trust

The Child Accident Prevention Trust is a national charity committed to reducing the number of children and young people killed, disabled and seriously injured as a result of accidents.

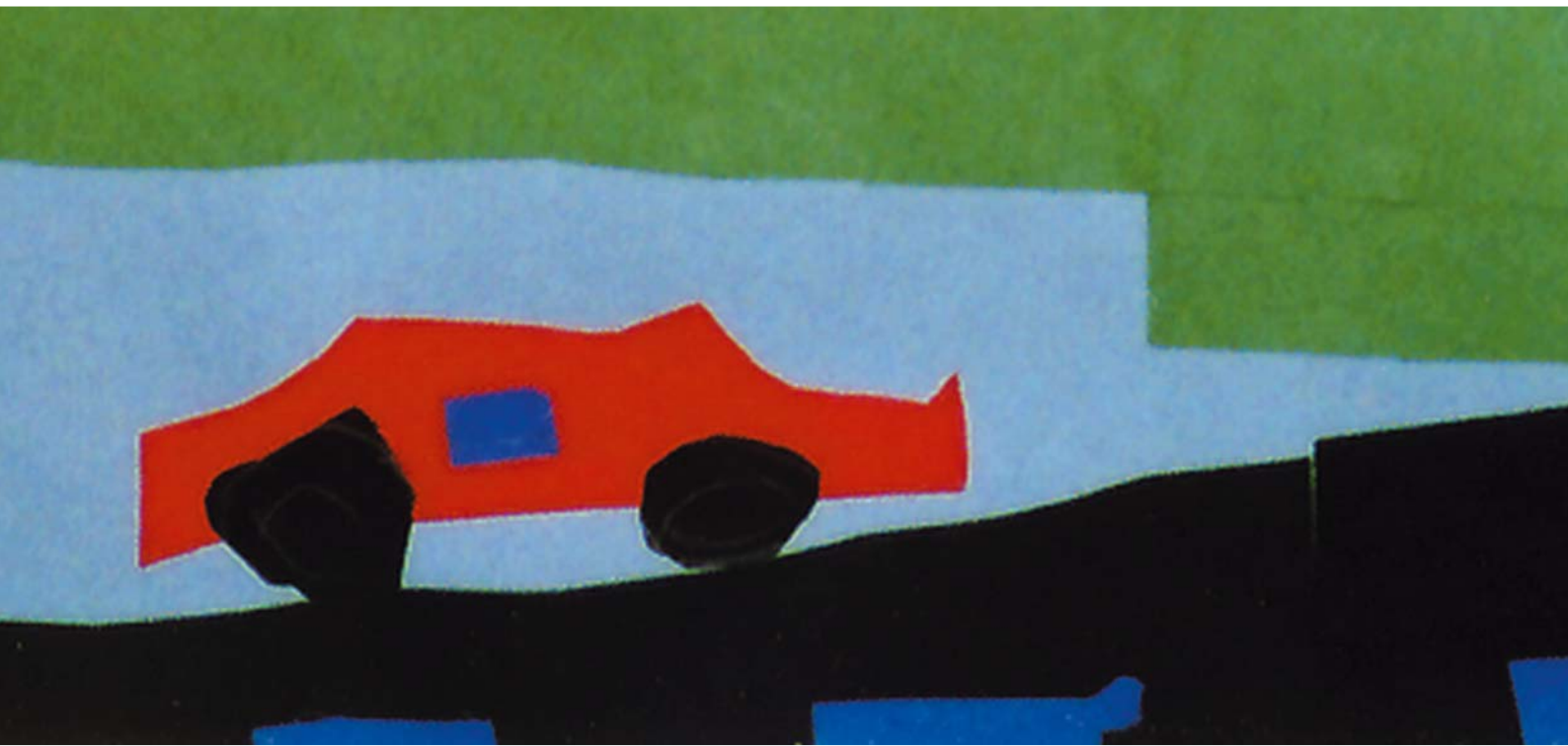
Our aim is to create a safer environment for children and young people. We understand that experimenting and risk-taking are part of growing up, and we work to secure low injury rates without compromising children's health and quality of life.

Our current priorities are to narrow the inequalities gap in childhood accidents, to reduce serious injuries with long-term consequences, and to spread knowledge about what works in preventing childhood accidents.

We achieve this through a range of activities:

- We support parents to understand how they can improve their children's safety, by providing them with opportunities to learn about both hazards and practical prevention measures.
- We take our knowledge and skills to the frontline of family support, by providing specialist advice on accident prevention to staff who work with parents and children in their local communities.
- We also act as a centre of specialist knowledge on child accident prevention for other charities, companies, standards bodies, and local and central government. We share information on what works, spread examples of good practice and encourage the development of safer products and environments, and the delivery of more effective prevention services.





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