

Top 10 Ways to Reduce Car Seat Safety - and How to Avoid Them

Car seat safety ideas and rules are constantly changing to put crash data to better use. These car seat safety ideas are designed to provide the best protection for your baby in case of a crash, but the constant changes can be confusing for parents. Confusion often leads to car seat safety errors. Take a look at these ten ways to make your baby less safe in the car and then learn how to fix common car seat safety mistakes.

1. Don't Use a Car Seat At All

Just because most of today's adult generation rode around without car seats and lived doesn't mean this is the best car seat safety practice now. Crash data has shown us that car seats work. A car seat's primary function is to prevent ejection from the vehicle, and preventing ejection makes death in a car crash 4 times less likely. Add that to the reduction in injuries when car seats are used, and the simple fact it is illegal to not use car seats and you have good reason to ignore the old-fashioned "in my day, no car seat" advice.

2. Throw Away Car Seat Instructions

That car seat instruction book is useless, right? Wrong. Guys, put aside the ego and refer to the instruction book! It tells you nearly everything you can or can't do to use the car seat safely. From where to place the harness height adjuster to when to use the top tether strap and where to place the car seat when installing with LATCH/ISOFIX, the instruction book is a wealth of car seat information. If you've lost it, call the manufacturer for a new one, look it up online or check the basic instructions on the car seat's side label.

3. Take Bad Car Seat Advice

Unfortunately a lot of car seat advice is outdated and dangerous. Parents report bad car seat advice from friends, doctors and police officers, because the advice-givers often don't have current information. When someone says you must turn your baby forward-facing at 10kgs, or that thick towels are great under harness straps, check the advice with a certified Safe2Go Technician to be sure you're getting the correct car seat advice.

4. Pick the Car Seat with the Prettiest Pattern

It's nice if your car seat cover matches your car's interior, but the real key to car seat safety is finding a car seat that matches your car and your baby. Reputable baby products stores should let you test the car seat in your vehicle before buying, or let you return it if it doesn't work with your car. If you can't easily install the car seat so that there is less than one inch of wiggle at the belt path, find a new car seat.

5. Don't Install the Seat Correctly

You need to install baby's car seat so there is less than an inch of wiggle at the seat belt path, and so that the recline angle is correct if the seat is rear-facing. You also must learn to lock your seatbelts to keep the car seat installed tightly, and you must be sure that at least 80 percent of the car seat's base is on the vehicle seat. A certified Safe2Go technician, car seat instruction book, and your vehicle owner's manual are the best resources for installation help.

6. Throw the Whole Car Seat in the Washing Machine

Car seats are specially designed with fabrics and plastics that can withstand crash forces. Once you douse the harness straps in bleach and iron them on high, they may not react the same way when baby really needs them. Buckles and other moving parts also can be damaged by soaking or rough cleaning. Babies can make incredibly gross messes in their car seats, but be sure to check the instructions or call the manufacturer for help before cleaning the car seat.

7. Buy All of the Car Seat Accessories

Car seat safety experts say toy bars, neck rolls, fabric covers, seat belt ratchets and other after-market accessories should not be used. If it didn't come with your car seat, leave it off. Manufacturers often void the car seat warranty if extras are used, too.

8. Don't Use All of the Car Seat Parts

Sometimes you have to re-thread the harness straps or take off the car seat cover. Getting the whole car seat put back together properly is a challenge, but it's important to get all of the parts back into the car seat correctly without leaving a spare parts pile. We've seen car seats used without chest clips, and with bungee cords where other parts should be! Always use your car seat according to manufacturer's instructions. Please, ask for help if you're stuck!

9. Ignore the Height and Weight Limits for Baby's Car Seat

Most parents end up buying several car seats as baby grows, especially if baby starts out in a rear-facing-only infant car seat. Often one car seat just won't do. Watch the height and weight limits for baby's car seat. Babies that are too tall or too heavy for their car seat are not adequately protected in a crash. Harness straps can pull through the seat if baby is too heavy, and baby's head won't have impact protection if he or she is too tall.

10. Use the Oldest, Cheapest Garage Sale or Internet Auction Car Seat You Can Find

Lots of people try to recoup their car seat cost by selling the car seat at a garage sale, internet auction or they give it to a friend to help out with new baby costs. Most parents aren't aware that car seats have an expiration date, though. Many car seats expire after 5 years, some after up to 8 years. Check with the manufacturer for details. You should never use a second-hand car seat if you don't know its crash history or recall history. The worst possible choice is buying a used car seat online, sight unseen.

At BabySafe we have a wide range of Car Seats available for sale or hire and we can provide expert advice on getting the best car seat for your child's needs. We have a great range of reputable brands including Safe n Sound, Maxi Cosi, Evenflo, Phil & Teds and more.