

Be seat safe!

'Seat belts aren't designed to fit children's smaller bodies in the right places. A seat belt should lie across chest and low across the hips of the child – never against their neck or across their stomach. So car seats and booster cushions are designed to "raise" children up to a level where the seat belt fits them safely,' says Katrina Phillips, chief executive of CAPT.

To ensure that children are in the right position to be safe in cars, the law says all children under 135cm (about 4ft 5in) in height who are also under 12 years old must use an appropriate child seat for their weight in both the front or back on every car journey.



Basic safety rules

There is detailed guidance around how to select the right seat for the weight of the children travelling in your car. (See also CAPT leaflet, [How safe is your child in the car? To see a sample copy visit the \[capt website\]\(#\) and go to Resources: \[Sample of our leaflets section\]\(#\). Details of how to request a single copy, or to buy bulk copies are also available on the CAPT website.\)](#)

- ✦ **Use the right seat** for the size and age of the child – as a childminder you will probably need several different categories of seats
- ✦ **Use a child car seat** on every journey, no matter how short
- ✦ **Make sure the seat** fits your car properly when buying the seat – take your car with you and try the seat in your car before you buy it
- ✦ **Never use a rear-facing** baby seat on the front seat if there is an active airbag – it is illegal to do so. That's because a rear-facing baby seat puts a baby's head very close to the dashboard. So, if the airbag inflates, the impact could cause injuries to young children. Always read the car handbook for advice about children and airbags in the particular make of car – and always follow that advice.
- ✦ **Use the seat properly** on every occasion – this means the way the seat manufacturer tells you, both in terms of fitting the seat in the car and fitting the child in the seat



Your questions answered:

Dr Mike Hayes is the Child Accident Prevention Trust's safety expert. Here he answers some frequently asked questions.

Question:

The eight-year-old I am looking after is exceptionally tall for his age. I have measured him and he's over the legal requirement of 135cm. Am I breaking the law if he travels without a booster seat? And should I insist that he uses one for safety reasons?

Answer:

The legal height limit for car seats exists to protect children – by making sure that the seat belt lies across their bodies in the right place. If a child is over the prescribed height then in law they do not need to use a booster seat. However, the seat belt may well fit the child better if a booster seat is used, even though the law does not require it.

Question:

Sometimes I find myself carrying the older brothers and sisters of children around in my car. I've noticed when they sit on a booster seat the seat belt seems to lie better across them even though they're taller than the 135cm. Is this correct?

Answer:

Yes, using a booster seat, even if the child is over 135cm, can help the seat belt to lie better across the child's body and provide better protection.

Question:

I'm confused! Are children allowed to travel in the front seat of my car?

Answer:

Yes – children can travel in the front seats of cars, but only when this is the safest option available for them. Any child is allowed to travel in the front seat of the car as long as they are properly restrained – with one exception: if there is an "active" airbag, babies in rear-facing baby seats are not allowed to travel there. Having said this, there is a difference between best practice and what the law allows. We would advise that all children travel properly restrained in the rear seat as the best option.