

# A Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Baby With a Child Safety Seat



firstride   
saferride

# Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

Make sure baby's **First Ride** is a **Safe Ride!**

The first of many parental responsibilities is to make sure your baby's first ride home from the hospital is as safe as possible. Here are four steps that all parents and caregivers should take to make sure this happens:

1. Follow Virginia's Child Restraint Device Law.  
(Code of Virginia Title 46.2, Chapter 10, Article 13 § 46.2-1095 through 46.2-1100).
2. Choose the right child safety seat for your baby.
3. Install the child safety seat correctly in your vehicle.
4. Secure your baby in the child safety seat correctly.

This guide will walk you through these four steps to make your baby's **FIRST Ride a SAFE Ride!**



## Step 1: Follow the Law: Virginia Child Restraint Device Law

(Code of Virginia Title 46.2, Chapter 10, Article 13 § 46.2-1095 through 46.2-1100)

An appropriate child restraint device is required for children **through the age of seven (until 8th birthday)**. Children are to ride rear-facing until age two. Safety seats must be properly used and approved by Department of Transportation standards. Proper use is defined by the label on the safety seat for height, weight, and sometimes age.



- Rear-facing child restraint devices must be placed in the back seat of a vehicle. In the event the vehicle does not have a back seat, the child restraint device may be placed in the front passenger seat only if the vehicle is either not equipped with a passenger side airbag or the passenger side airbag has been deactivated.
- Children may not ride unrestrained in the rear cargo area of vehicles.
- The law applies to anyone (i.e. parents, grandparents, babysitters, caregivers, friends, etc.) who provides transportation for a child in any vehicle manufactured after January 1, 1968. Public transportation (taxis, buses), regulation school buses, and farm vehicles are exempt. Ride share services such as Uber and Lyft are not exempt.
- The child restraint law is primary enforcement—no other violation need be committed prior to ticketing for failure to have a child in an appropriate and approved seat.
- A \$50 civil penalty fine is imposed for failure to have a child in a child restraint device. Any person found guilty a second or additional times, on different dates, will be fined up to \$500. An additional \$20 civil penalty fine is assessed when persons transporting a child exempted from this law due to medical reasons do not carry a written statement of the exemption. All fines collected go into a special fund to purchase safety seats for low-income families.

## Step 2: Choose the Right Child Safety Seat for Your Baby

There are two types of child safety seats for infants:

1. Rear-facing-only safety seat
2. Convertible safety seat that can be used in the rear-facing and forward-facing positions. This includes convertible, 3-in-1, and all-in-one safety seats.

A rear-facing-only safety seat may appear to fit better, but the infant will often outgrow this type of safety seat before they are able to face forward. A convertible safety seat can be used from birth until the child transitions to the next step of a booster seat. Because these safety seats are larger, additional steps may need to be taken to ensure a secure fit for an infant.

It is recommended that you follow the safety seat manufacturer guidelines.

### Why a Rear-Facing Safety Seat?

Infants involved in a car crash are at risk for serious injury or death. Your infant's body is not strong enough to protect itself from impact.

In addition, your infant's neck, bones, ligaments, and muscles are not developed enough to support their head, making him or her very susceptible to a serious brain or spinal cord injury. The rear-facing seat provides support to the child's back, neck, and head to reduce the chance of brain or spinal cord injury.

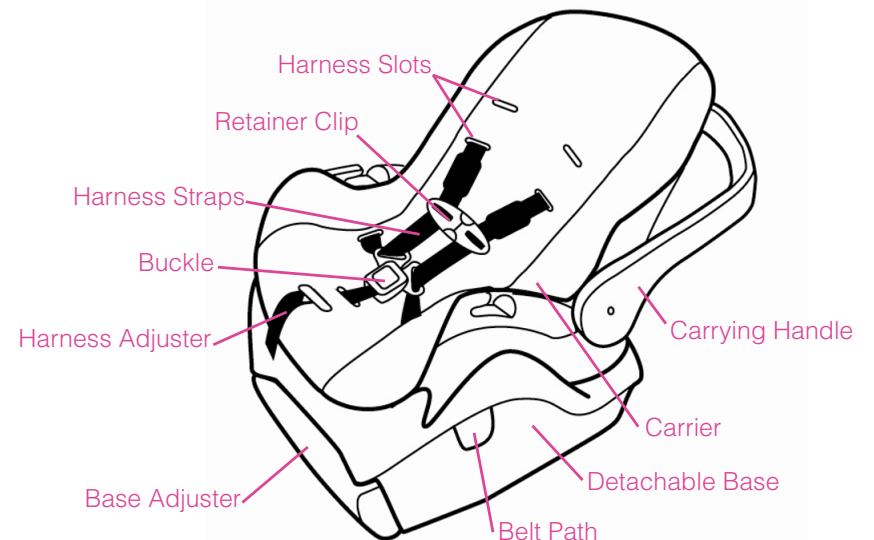
### Rear-Facing-Only Safety Seat

Rear-facing-only child safety seats are designed to be used only in the rear-facing position.

- Most rear-facing-only safety seats come with a carrier and a base. The base is installed in the vehicle, and the carrier can easily be removed from the base without taking the baby out of the carrier. An extra base can usually be purchased for use in another vehicle.

- Rear-facing-only safety seats have an upper weight and height limit that will vary for each safety seat. Weight and height limits are listed on the safety seat label and in the safety seat instruction manual.
- Once your baby reaches the weight or height limit of the rear-facing-only safety seat or if your baby's head is less than one inch away from the top of the seat, the baby should use a convertible safety seat in the rear-facing position. Convertible safety seats usually have higher weight and height limits in the rear-facing position than rear-facing-only safety seats.

### Rear-Facing-Only

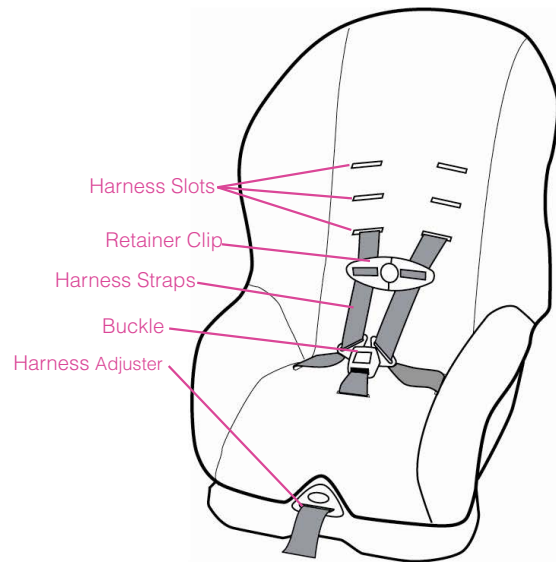




## Rear-Facing Convertible Safety Seat

Convertible child safety seats can be used rear-facing and then forward-facing once the rear-facing weight or height limit is reached.

- Convertible safety seats will have two different sets of weight and height limits; one for rear-facing and one for forward-facing.
- Convertible safety seats usually have higher weight and height limits in the rear-facing position than rear-facing-only safety seats. These safety seats allow the child to remain rear-facing longer, offering greater protection in the event of a crash.



### FAQ: Should I turn my baby if his feet are pressed against the back of the vehicle seat?

No. Children should remain rear-facing as long as they are within the weight and height limits of the safety seat. A child whose feet are pressed against the vehicle seat back may obtain minor injuries in a crash such as a broken leg as compared to more serious head and spinal cord injuries if they are turned too early.

### What if my baby is very small?

Premature and very small infants may need to ride in a safety seat for other considerations, such as a car bed, rather than a traditional safety seat. For more information, consult with your baby's pediatrician.

## Step 3: Install the Child Safety Seat Correctly in Your Vehicle

With so many different vehicles and safety seats available, no two safety seats are installed the same way.

The following are some general installation guidelines:

- Follow Virginia Law (Code of Virginia Title 46.2, Chapter 10, Article 13 § 46.2-1095 through 46.2-1100)
- Follow your vehicle and safety seat manufacturer's safety seat installation guidelines,
  1. Angle position to prevent airway obstruction
  2. Use a rolled towel, rolled blanket, or a pool noodle
  3. Level indicators



## Secure Your Infant's Seat

Not having a snug installation is one of the most common and dangerous mistakes. Approximately 80 percent of safety seats are incorrectly secured in the vehicle (Virginia Department of Health, Safety Seat Check Stations, 2018).

There are two different ways to secure a safety seat in your vehicle - using the vehicle seat belt or the LATCH system (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children).

### Vehicle Seat Belt

1. Must be buckled correctly without twists in the seat belt using the correct belt path on the child safety seat.
2. The seat belt needs to be locked to keep the safety seat in place. Check the vehicle owner's manual for how to lock the seat belt.

### LATCH system (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children)

1. The LATCH system allows you to install the safety seat to the vehicle using straps and hooks on the safety seat and anchor hardware in the vehicle.
2. Most rear-facing safety seats only use the lower anchors. Some manufacturers of convertible safety seats allow for the tether to be used in the rear-facing mode.

**Here are some additional tips for installation with seat belt or LATCH. Please also follow manufacturer guidelines.**

- Make sure to put weight on the safety seat as you install it to depress air out of the vehicle seat.
- As you apply weight, pull the slack out of the LATCH straps or vehicle seat belt.
- The safety seat should not move more than one inch from side-to-side or front-to-back when pulled at the belt path or LATCH straps of the safety seat

**DO NOT secure the safety seat using LATCH and the vehicle safety belt at the same time.**

### FAQ: Can I buy harness strap covers and a head support for my safety seat to keep my baby comfortable?

Do not use any accessories that did not come with the safety seat. This includes extra padding on the harness straps and head supports. These items were not crash tested with the seat and may interfere with keeping your baby safe in a crash. You should always refer back to the manufacturer guidelines.

### Can I wrap my baby in a blanket in the safety seat to keep him warm?

Always buckle your baby in the seat first, then place blankets OVER the harness, never under the harness straps or between your baby and the safety seat. Do not dress your infant in bulky outerwear. It can interfere with getting a secure harness fit. Dress the baby in light clothing that keeps the legs free.

## Step 4: Secure Your Baby in the Child Safety Seat Correctly

Harness straps hold your baby in the safety seat, and should fit snug.

The most common and safest type of harness is a five-point harness.

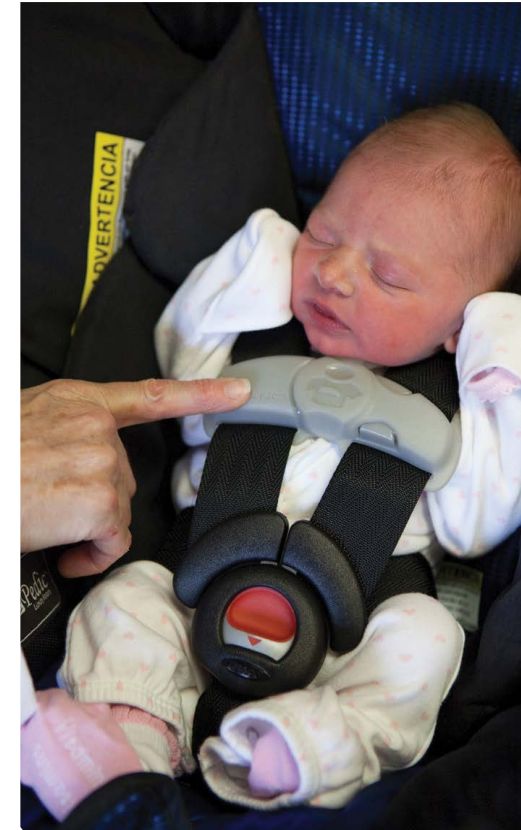
Use the lowest harness slots for a newborn infant. You will need to move to higher harness slots as your baby grows. However, while rear-facing, the harness straps should always be in the slots at or below the baby's shoulders.

Keep harness straps snug and flat on baby's shoulders, not arms. The harness straps are secure when you cannot pinch a fold in the harness material.

Most safety seats have a plastic harness retainer clip that should be level with the baby's armpits. This clip helps to hold the harness straps on the shoulders.

If the safety seat did not come with a head support or your baby needs additional support to prevent his/her head from flopping to the side, place small, rolled blankets on each side of your baby's shoulders and head to fill the empty space. Do not place the blanket behind your baby's head.

If your baby is pulling his/her legs up and out of the leg straps, a small rolled cloth or towel can be put between her/his legs behind the crotch buckle. Please refer to the safety seat instruction manual to confirm this is approved to do with your safety seat.



## Other Considerations

### Has your safety seat been recalled?

Sometimes a defect shows up after a safety seat has been sold resulting in a recall. To be alerted if your safety seat has been recalled, register your safety seat with the manufacturer. This can be done by mailing in the registration card that comes with the safety seat or on the manufacturer's website.

Visit [www.nhtsa.gov/recalls](http://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) or [www.safetyseatva.org](http://www.safetyseatva.org) to find out if your child safety seat has been recalled.



Be sure to share this life-saving information with grandparents and other caregivers that may transport your baby.

View the enclosed DVD to see a demonstration of the proper installation of a rear-facing child safety seat. This DVD allows for English or Spanish viewing.

### Do you have a used safety seat?

New seats are best, but if you have a used child safety seat, keep the following in mind:

- Look for the manufacturing date on the seat label. Most manufacturers recommend seats not be used if they are more than 5 to 10 years old.
- Seats with obvious cracks, holes, dents, or missing parts are not safe to use.
- If you do not know its history, do not use the seat. It may have been in a crash.
- Do not use a seat without a manufacturer's label. You need the label to check for seat recalls and to determine the age of the seat.
- Avoid seats without an instruction manual unless you can get a replacement from the manufacturer.
- If you have a used safety seat, register the seat on the manufacturer's website. This ensures that the manufacturer will alert you directly of any recalls to your safety seat.

### Has your safety seat been involved in a crash?

If you were involved in a car crash with or without a child buckled into the safety seat, the safety seat may need to be replaced. The forces in a collision can sometimes cause unseen damage to a safety seat. This hidden damage may keep the safety seat from properly protecting the child in future crashes. Contact the safety seat manufacturer or refer to the safety seat instruction manual as you may need to replace the seat whether or not a child was in it.

## Child Safety Seat Installation Resources:

- Visit one of Virginia's Child Safety Seat Check Stations for free hands-on assistance from a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. Call 1-800-732-8333 or visit [www.safetyseatva.org](http://www.safetyseatva.org) for a location near you.
- Call Virginia's Child Passenger Safety Information Line to speak to a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician at 1-800-732-8333.
- Income eligible families can apply for a free safety seat as early as the third trimester of pregnancy through the Low Income Safety Seat Distribution and Education Program. For more information about the program, please visit [www.safetyseatva.org](http://www.safetyseatva.org) or call 1-800-732-8333.
- Visit [www.safetyseatva.org](http://www.safetyseatva.org) to learn more information about child passenger safety and other tips for keeping your baby safe.

This guide contains general guidelines for installing your child's safety seat. For additional information regarding specific vehicles and safety seats, always refer to the instruction manuals for the vehicle and the child safety seat.

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Injury and Violence Prevention Program  
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**1-800-732-8333**

**[www.safetyseatva.org](http://www.safetyseatva.org)**