

# Growing Up Buckled Up in North Carolina



## Protecting Children in Crashes Requires 3 Important Steps:

### 1. The restraint must be right for the size and age of the child.

- ▶ **Use rear-facing child restraints (CRs)** - in either a rear-facing-only (infant) seat or convertible seat - for children until at least 2 years of age or until they reach the maximum height and weight for their seat. For optimal protection, the child should remain rear facing until reaching the maximum weight for the car safety seat, as long as the top of the head is below the top of the seat back.
- ▶ **Use forward-facing CRs with a harness** for children who have outgrown the rear-facing capabilities of the seat. After being turned around to face the front of the vehicle, children should ride in a front-facing restraint with harness until the harness is outgrown. The upper weight limit for many harnesses is 40 pounds, but a more and more models have harnesses that can be used over 40 pounds.
- ▶ **Use belt-positioning booster seats** - used to raise a child up and make the lap and shoulder belts fit correctly - when the front-facing harness seat is outgrown (40 pounds for most models). The child should continue to use the belt-positioning booster until the vehicle's lap and shoulder belt fits correctly.
- ▶ Add-on shoulder belt adjusters are not recommended since they are not covered by any Federal standards and may do more harm than good.
- ▶ **Never tuck the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back.** Both of these common practices are dangerous and illegal.
- ▶ **Use seat belts** for older children only when they are large enough for the belt to fit correctly. Usually, this will be about 8 years old or older and about 80 pounds or more. To tell if a child is big enough to use just the vehicle lap and shoulder belt, ask the following questions: 1) can he sit all the way back against the auto seat? 2) do his knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat? 3) does the shoulder belt cross his shoulder between his neck and arm? 4) is the lap belt positioned low and touching his thighs? and 5) will he stay seated like this for the whole trip? If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, a belt-positioning booster seat is needed for the best crash protection.
- ▶ Whenever possible, keep children **younger than age 13 buckled up in a rear seat** of the vehicle.
- ▶ Child restraints more than 10 years old or passed the manufacturer specified expiration date should not be used. Any child seat, regardless of age, that has been in a severe crash should be replaced.

### 2. The child must be buckled correctly into the restraint .

- ▶ The type of harness must be appropriate for the size of the child. Harnesses with shields do not fit small infants well.

NC has three occupant restraint laws. Their basic requirements are that:

- ▶ All drivers and all passengers, regardless of age - front seat or rear seat, must be properly buckled up in vehicles required to have seat belts.
- ▶ Children younger than age 8 **and** who weigh less than 80 pounds must be properly secured in a child restraint (CR).
- ▶ Belt-positioning booster seats can be used for older and larger children if lap and shoulder combination belts are available.
- ▶ Lap-only seat belts can be used for children over 40 pounds if no lap and shoulder combination seat belt is available. Belt-positioning booster seats **must not** be used with just a lap belt.
- ▶ CRs for children less than age 5 and less than 40 pounds must be installed in the rear seat in vehicles with active passenger-side front air bags if the vehicle has a rear seat.
- ▶ When a child reaches age 8 (regardless of weight) OR 80 pounds (regardless of age), a **correctly fitted** seat belt may be used instead of a CR to restrain the child.
- ▶ Placing the shoulder belt under a child's (or adult's) arm or behind the back is **dangerous and illegal**.
- ▶ Children less than age 16 are prohibited from riding in the open bed of a pickup truck or other open cargo area.
- ▶ Drivers are legally responsible for obeying these laws.
- ▶ The penalty for violating the Child Restraint/Booster Seat law is 2 driver license points, a \$25 fine and at least \$140 in court costs.

- ▶ All parts of the harness must be present and in good condition.
- ▶ In general, the harness straps should be at or below shoulder level for rear-facing restraints and at or above shoulder level for forward-facing restraints. Refer to the CR manufacturer's instructions to be sure.
- ▶ The harness must be as snug as possible without pressing into the child's skin and causing physical discomfort. You should not be able to pinch the strap to make a fold in the harness webbing.

### 3. The restraint must be correctly installed in the vehicle.

- ▶ **NEVER install a rear-facing child restraint in front of an active front air bag.**
- ▶ The rear seat is safer for children than the front seat. Whenever possible, child restraints should be installed in the center-rear seat.
- ▶ Either the vehicle seat belt or LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) system should be used to install the child restraint. LATCH is found on most CRs and vehicles manufactured after September 1, 2002.
- ▶ The CR must be installed tightly in the vehicle. To check, hold the shell of the CR at the seat belt path (where the seat belt goes through the CR or where it would go through if not using the lower LATCH attachments) and pull toward the front of the car and side-to-side. There should be no more than 1 inch of movement in either direction.
- ▶ The seat belt or LATCH attachments must be locked in order to stay tight. Check the vehicle owner's manual to be sure how to lock the seat belt. Read the CR instructions to be sure how to lock the LATCH attachments.
- ▶ Top tethers can make most forward-facing restraints work better and can be used with either the lower anchors of the LATCH system or the vehicle seat belt. Follow instructions to install and use tether straps whenever possible.

For further information or to order brochures or other educational materials, visit [www.buckleupnc.org](http://www.buckleupnc.org) or contact:

UNC Highway Safety Research Center  
800-672-4527 / 919-962-2202  
[www.hsrc.unc.edu](http://www.hsrc.unc.edu)

NC Governor's Highway Safety Program  
919-733-3083  
[www.ncdot.org/programs/ghsp/](http://www.ncdot.org/programs/ghsp/)

NC Dept. of Insurance Safe Kids Buckle Up  
919-661-5880  
[www.ncsafekids.org](http://www.ncsafekids.org)