

## **THREE BASIC STEPS TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT SAFETY SEAT FOR YOUR CHILD**

Regardless of whether it's your first or fifth, buying a child safety seat can be baffling. You walk into the store, and there they are, all lined up along the aisles, ready for your inspection. The sheer number and styles are enough to make the average buyer wonder where to begin. What do you do? Do you ask the shoppers nearby if they know more than you do about the advantages of one seat over another? As you stare at the vast array of child safety seats, you realize you must learn a whole new vocabulary before you can select the seat that best suits your child. Here are a few descriptions of car seats you will discover:

- child safety seat
- infant-only child safety seat
- convertible safety seat
- rear-facing seat
- forward-facing toddler seat
- booster seat
- special car bed for preemies
- five point harness

### **Where do you start?**

Regardless of the size and age of the child, your goal is the same for every other buyer. You want to find an affordable safety seat that fits and protects your child and that you can install properly in your motor vehicle.

It may sound simple, but it can be difficult to get right. Why? Because you have to consider so many variables, and you get one wrong and you have not accomplished your goal of keeping your child safe. Here are a few examples of information you better have to help make your decision:

- your child's age
- your child's height and weight
- your child's shoulder height
- location of harness slots on the chair

And that's not all the information you need. The fact is that you can't just walk into a store and buy the right child safety seat without educating yourself in advance.

Here is a summary of what Virginia law (Code of Virginia § 46.2-1095) requires:

- Children 8 and younger must be in a properly secured child restraint device that meets the standards adopted by the US Department of Transportation.

- Rear-facing devices must be placed in the back seat of the vehicle.
  - If there is no back seat, the rear-facing 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 if the passenger side airbag has been deactivated. (See Code of Virginia § 46.2-1095.)
- Children younger than 16 (and older than 8) must be provided with and properly secured by an appropriate safety belt system, consisting of lap belts, shoulder harnesses, combinations thereof or similar devices (for vehicles manufactured after 1968).

(There are certain exceptions to these Virginia requirements that are not included in this article. Other states have laws that are different from Virginia's, so check your own state's law.)

### **Three Basic Steps**

There are three basic steps to correctly choose and use a child safety seat: check the law, check the child and check the installation.

1. Make sure that the seat you are about to buy carries a label stating that it meets federal motor vehicle safety standards.
2. Consider whether your child's age and weight fit the car seat's weight and age limit. If they do not, you will NOT be buying a safe seat for your child.
3. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and install the seat correctly.

**Remember: Even if you buy the best child safety seat on the market today, your child will not be safe if you don't properly place and secure your child in the seat, or if you don't install the seat itself correctly.**

Sandra Rohrstaff is a partner in the law firm of Weiner, Rohrstaff & Spivey, plc, located in Fairfax, Virginia. The firm works to protect the rights of people who have been injured by others, including children. Weiner, Rohrstaff & Spivey can be found online at [www.WRSattorneys.com](http://www.WRSattorneys.com).