

Child Restraints

Research suggests that children are being moved into bigger seats (or are prematurely graduating to seatbelts alone) when this is not appropriate for their size. Adult seatbelts do not fit properly over a small child's lap and shoulder, exposing the child's abdomen and neck to serious injury in the event of a crash. A child that is properly secured in an approved child restraint is less likely to be injured or killed in a car crash than one who is not.

It is important that a child outgrows one type of restraint before moving to the next type of restraint. (A child can safely remain in a restraint until the child's eye line is the same height as the rear of the seat and the shoulders of the child are less than 1 inch higher than the shoulder straps.)

Children 4 to 7 years

Children from the age of four to seven years old are to be seated in an approved forward facing child restraint safety seat (with inbuilt harness) or an approved booster seat (restrained by a correctly adjusted seatbelt or child safety harness).

- Booster cushions (that is, seats with no backs) do not provide any side impact protection and are not recommended. However, if a booster seat is used, it should not be used in seating positions next to doors and windows. These boosters should only be used in the centre of the rear row with a lap-sash seatbelt.

- To prevent a child from slipping under the seatbelt in a crash (sometimes called 'submarining'), some booster seats use a clip attached to the lap part of the seatbelt. Others use the design of the base of the seat itself.

Children over the age of 7 years

Children 7 years and over are required to be restrained in an approved child restraint (child safety seat or booster seat depending on their size) or a properly adjusted seatbelt.

- A properly adjusted seatbelt must pass over the pelvis and hips, not touch the wearer's head or neck and is adjusted so the buckle is at or below the level of the hip. As seatbelts are designed primarily for adults, a child restraint should be provided until they are able to wear the seatbelt correctly.

Can a child over 7 years sit in the front passenger seat?

Child restraint manufacturers warn against using restraints in positions fitted with airbags and most vehicle manufacturers warn against placing children under the age of 12 in these positions. These warnings should be followed.

There are now a number of vehicle manufacturers who are placing warnings in their Owner's Manual, on the sun visor or even on the windscreen indicating that children under the age of 12 years should not be placed in the front passenger seat because of the airbag.

The difficulty is that these warnings vary from vehicle to vehicle, but most manufacturers tend to agree on the age of 12. Drivers should look for and obey these warnings.



It is safer for children of any age to travel in the back seat. Research suggests that a seatbelt (without a restraint) will fit a child properly when they are around 140 cm tall. It is therefore important to check whether your child is tall enough to be safely restrained by a seatbelt alone.

Therefore, if your child is 7 years or older and still fits in their booster seat, keep using it until they have physically outgrown it.

Penalties

Since the 1st July 2010, fines have increased and drivers failing to ensure that passengers under 16 years of age are restrained correctly are fined \$248 and incur 3 demerit points for one passenger and \$302 and 5 demerit points for more than one passenger.

RAA – Child Safety Centre – viewed 24th March 2011

<http://www.raa.com.au/page.aspx?TerID=491>

“Choosing the right restraint for your child”, Your guide to South Australia’s child restraint laws. – viewed 24th March 2011

http://www.dtej.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/47835/child_restraint_MAC_110610.pdf

For more information and further clarification, please contact the RAA, Child Safety Centre on ph 8202 4592 or Senior Constable Amanda Dawson, South Coast Crime Prevention Section ph 8392 9153.