

# Pointers For Parents

## Child Safety Seats: What You Should Know

(NAPS)—Surprisingly, many parents could do more to protect their offspring. Without realizing it, more than 80 percent of parents either install their car seat incorrectly or fail to use an appropriate seat for their child's size and weight.

"We see multiple child safety seat misuses every day that have the potential to result in fatal or serious injury," says Lorrie Walker, child passenger safety coordinator at Florida Atlantic University. "Problems with car seats are not limited to improper installation. Parents who install the car seat correctly in the vehicle may not necessarily secure their child properly in the seat itself."

Walker urges parents to do their homework before purchasing a safety seat. She suggests taking family vehicles to the store and actually trying several different seats in the vehicles before making a purchase. Parents and caregivers should thoroughly read instruction manuals, and practice proper installation until it becomes second nature. The next step is practicing placing the child in the safety seat and adjusting the harness so it lies snug and flat on the baby's chest.

There are several additional steps parents should take before buying new car seats:

First, find out what kind of car seat is appropriate for the child. The National Highway Traffic



**A car safety seat must be installed properly, and be appropriate for the child's size and weight. Parents like the handy mirror built into the base of this car seat.**

Safety Administration (NHTSA) advises that an infant at least 20 pounds and up to one year old is safest when riding in a rear-facing car seat, in the back seat of the car. This kind of seat provides life-saving back, neck and head support in case of a frontal crash, the most common type of crash.

There are two types of seats that accommodate infants. One is called an infant-only car seat and is outgrown once the child is at least 20 pounds and one year of age. Typically, these models offer the convenience of a base that stays in the vehicle, while the seat itself can be used as a carrier. A convertible car seat is used both rear-facing for infants (up to 30 pounds and one year) and forward-facing for toddlers (over one

year and up to the upper weight limits on the safety seat).

Some parents are uncomfortable with the rear-facing seating position because they can't see the baby's face. Parents often improvise by pinning mirrors on the vehicle seat cushion so they can watch the baby. But this can be dangerous in the event of a crash. Fisher-Price has addressed this issue with an infant safety seat called the "Stay-In-View." It comes equipped with a built-in mirror, allowing the driver to keep baby in full view (for instance, when stopped at a traffic light) when buckled in the rear seat as recommended.

Finally, the NHTSA and the American Academy of Pediatrics remind parents that children who have outgrown convertible car seats still need the protection offered by a belt-positioning booster car seat. This type of car seat positions the safety belt properly across the child's chest and hips. Until children reach a height and weight which allows the vehicle safety belts to fit properly around them (usually about five feet in height and 80 pounds), a booster seat helps position the adult-sized safety belts properly.

For more information on how to protect children in the car, NHTSA provides safety tips which can be found on the Web at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov).