

CHILD SAFETY ALERT

Boosting Children's Auto Safety

(NAPSA)—The next time you give your child a lift in the car, you may want to check to see if he needs a boost, too.

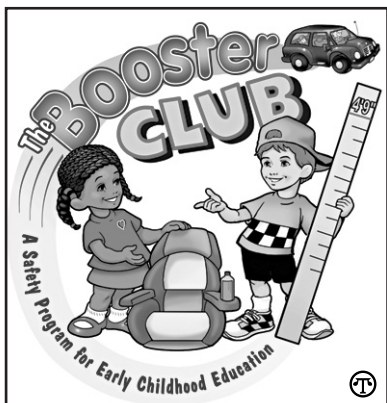
Experts say children who have outgrown their toddler seats (usually at age 4 or 40 pounds) are far safer sitting in booster seats until they are about 8 years old or 4'9" tall than they are using seat belts alone. Yet the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) says 80 to 90 percent of the children in America who should be restrained in booster seats are not.

"Safety belts are not designed to fit smaller children," says NHTSA administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D. "Booster seats remedy that problem by positioning that belt where it is most effective."

Just how effective are booster seats? Studies show that young children prematurely moved to safety belts are four times more likely to suffer serious head injuries in a crash than are children in child safety or booster seats.

Experts say a major roadblock to widespread use of booster seats is information. Many parents and caregivers simply do not know about the importance of the seats. That's where a new partnership may help. NHTSA recently partnered with the Ad Council to create a set of public service announcements (PSAs) geared toward teaching people about the importance of booster seats. The PSAs are a part of the Ad Council's highly successful Safety Belt Education Campaign. They feature new child-sized Crash Test Dummy characters (a throwback to "Vince" and "Larry," the now famous Crash Test Dummies from PSAs in the '80s and '90s).

The PSAs feature parents participating in everyday activities—such as playing in the park—



Children who are under 4 feet, 9 inches tall should be restrained in booster seats when riding in vehicles.

with child-sized Crash Test Dummies instead of their children. A voice-over tells the viewers, "You wouldn't treat a Crash Test Dummy like a child, so why treat a child like a Crash Test Dummy?" The ads then direct audiences to visit a newly created Web site—www.boosterseat.gov—for additional information about the importance of the seats. The PSAs were created pro bono by ad agency Leo Burnett USA.

NHTSA will also make an educational kit available free to preschool and kindergarten teachers. The kit includes a classroom activity guide, booster club growth chart and a set of decals to display on family cars—all of which are meant to spread the word on the importance of booster seats.

Since Vince and Larry were introduced to America in 1985, safety belt usage has increased from 14 percent to 80 percent. It's hoped that the new PSAs and educational kits can yield similar success with regard to older child passengers.

For more information, visit www.boosterseat.gov.