Safety Sense

When Buying A Booster Seat, Check With The Experts

(NAPSA)—Before you shop for a booster seat, there's one thing you ought to know: Not all booster seats on the market will provide the right fit for the car you drive.

Using a booster seat is important. With a booster seat, children ages 4 to 8 are 45 percent less likely to sustain injuries in crashes than when they're in belts alone.

Fortunately, your efforts to choose the right seat can get a boost from some expert guidance. Following the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety ratings can make it easier to select boosters.

Unlike child restraints with built-in harnesses, a booster seat relies on a vehicle safety belt to buckle the child in. Its purpose is to make the adult belt fit the child better.

Safety belts are designed with adults in mind, not kids, but when a booster seat does its job, the vehicle belt will fit a child correctly. That means the lap belt will lie flat across a child's upper thighs, not across the soft abdomen, and the shoulder belt will cross snugly over the middle of a child's shoulder.

The Institute assigns tested seats into four categories:

Best Bets are seats that provide good fit for typical 4- to 8-year-olds in almost any car, minivan or SUV.

Good Bets provide acceptable fit in most cars, minivans or SUVs.

Not Recommended don't provide a good fit and should be avoided.

Check Fit applies to booster seats that have varied results depending on child size and vehicle model.

Unlike child restraints with built-in harnesses, a booster seat relies on a vehicle safety belt to buckle the child in.

Checking Booster Fit

Both the lap and shoulder belts must fit your child correctly.

To check the lap belt fit, make sure it lies flat and on top of the thighs, not higher up on the abdomen.

To check the shoulder belt fit, make sure it fits across the middle of the child's shoulder. If it falls off the shoulder or rests on your child's neck, it won't work as well. An improper fit could encourage your child to move the belt to a dangerous position, such as behind the back or under the arm.

The Institute assesses boosters using a special crash test dummy representing an average-sized 6-year-old. Engineers measure how three-point lap and shoulder belts fit in each of the tested boosters under conditions that span the range of safety belt configurations in vehicle models.

For more information, visit www.iihs.org.