

## What Is a Booster Seat?

A booster seat is usually a firm cushion of foam or plastic that raises the child higher in the car to improve the position and angle of the shoulder belt and the lap belt. (If there are no shoulder belts in the back seat of your car, skip to the bottom of the page.) It will have either slots, clips, or arms to keep the lap belt low, resting on the child's hips and thighs. There are backless, highback, and removable-back boosters. Most boosters include a shoulder belt guide or comfort clip that can or must be used to pull the shoulder belt slightly down so it crosses the center of the shoulder and chest.

### Choosing the best booster for your child

The ideal booster has an adjustable headrest and high-density, energy-absorbing foam in the head and chest areas. To protect the neck and spine, the child's head (up to the top of the ears) must be supported by the vehicle seatback, booster, or headrest. An adjustable headrest helps keep a sleeping child positioned properly under the vehicle belt and positions the shoulder belt comfortably without preventing it from retracting properly.

Backless boosters are lightweight and inexpensive making them a reasonable choice for carpooling, play dates, and public distribution programs. A backless booster should not be used unless the child is able to sit upright throughout the trip and the child's head is supported by the vehicle seatback. For family trips, a backless booster can be used in the car on the way to the airport. Then, to be guaranteed its arrival at the destination, pack it in a carry-on bag. Boosters may not be used on aircraft. If it has a removable back, that can travel inside a suitcase.

Combination seats, which are often marketed as "highback boosters," usually have a harness that can be used up to 40 to 90 pounds and then removed to convert the seat to a booster. See cautions in next section.

### How to tell if a booster fits

Try the booster with your child in your car(s). Make sure the lap belt is positioned low, touching the child's thighs, and the shoulder belt crosses the middle of the child's shoulder, touching the chest.

Cautions: On some boosters and combination seats used as boosters, the shoulder belt can get stuck in the belt guide, not allowing it to properly retract. In this case, try moving the seat to a different position in the car and supervise the child to make sure the shoulder belt is snug at all times.

For backless boosters, if the shoulder belt fits properly, it is not necessary to use the shoulder belt clip. If the clip is needed to keep the belt from scraping the neck or face, supervise the child closely, or select a different model.

### When a booster should not be used

- If your car does not have shoulder belts in the back seat, a booster seat cannot be used. (Many cars made before 1990 have only lap belts in the back seat; cars made before 2006 may not have a shoulder belt in the center.)
- If your child is too large for a typical safety seat with its own harness and is less than 4-5 years old or extremely active, he or she probably is not ready to sit still in a lap and shoulder belt with a booster. You need a larger seat or a travel vest to keep the child properly seated and secured. There are safety seats available with harness limits of up to 90 lbs. and travel vests that go up to 80 lbs.

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.** P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)  
800/745-SAFE (English) 800/747-SANO (Spanish)

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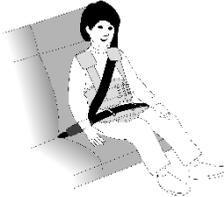
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## Different types of belt positioning boosters



### **Combination Safety Seat**

Safety seat with an internal harness that can be removed or stored in the safety seat when used in booster mode. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to switch safety seat to booster mode.



### **Belt Positioning Vest**

Instead of boosting the child up for the safety belt to fit properly, a vest holds the safety belt in place on the child's shoulder and lap. Some can be used with a tether, which helps the child stay in position.



### **Highback Boosters with Adjustable Headrest**

Recommended for best positioning of shoulder belt, to keep sleeping child placed properly in belt, and for head support in vehicles with low seatbacks. Some have removable back.

### **Highback Boosters**

Back is not removable. No adjustable headrest. Do not use if shoulder belt is not touching child's shoulder and chest or if lap belt is not touching top of child's thighs.



### **Backless Boosters**

Acceptable if child's head is supported by vehicle seatback. May have belt adjuster clip/strap.

**Please note:** Most kids need to ride in a booster seat until age 10-12. If your child isn't using a booster, try the 5-Step-Test the next time you ride together in the car. Your child may not yet ready to use a safety belt only.

### **The 5-Step Test**

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to make both the shoulder belt and the lap belt fit right for the best crash protection. Your child will be more comfortable, too.

For best protection, all children should ride in the back seat. It's twice as safe as the front!

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