

Mitchell Crime Prevention Unit

February Crime Prevention Tip

Topic: **Child Passenger Safety – The Basics**

- 1. Rear-facing infant seats** in the back seat from birth to at least one year old and at least 20 pounds.
- 2. Forward-facing toddler seats** in the back seat from age one to about age four and 20 to 40 pounds.
- 3. Booster seats** in the back seat from about age four and 40 pounds to at least age eight, unless 4'9".
- 4. Safety belts** at age eight or older or taller than 4'9". All children 12 and under should ride in the back seat.

Most kids age four to eight need booster seats. NHTSA recommends using booster seats in the back seat for children from about age four and 40 pounds to at least age eight, unless 4'9".

Moving to a safety belt too early greatly increases risk of injury. Children age two to five who are prematurely graduated to safety belts are four times more likely to sustain a serious head injury than those restrained in child safety seats or booster seats. [Winston, F.K., Durbin, D.R., Kallan, M.J., & Moll, E.K. (2000). "The danger of premature graduation to safety belts for young children." *Pediatrics*, 105(6), 1179-1183]

Because many State laws only require children to be in a safety seat up to age four or so, many parents assume older kids are safe in just a safety belt. However, all children need to be restrained correctly whenever they ride in a motor vehicle. As of December 2002, only 15 States and the District of Columbia had enacted booster seat provisions in their child restraint laws.

The booster seat step is overlooked by the majority of people—across race and income levels. Sixty-three percent of children who should have been in belt-positioning booster seats, typically children age four to eight, are inappropriately restrained. [Child Passengers at Risk in America: A National Study of Restraint Use, National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 2002]

Many children are placed in the wrong restraint. A third of children (33 percent) age 14 and under ride in the wrong restraint type for their age and size. [Child Passengers at Risk in America: A National Study of Restraint Use, National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 2002]

The vast majority of child safety seats are used incorrectly. According to a 2002 National SAFE KIDS Campaign study, more than 81 percent of child restraints are used incorrectly, including 88 percent of forward-facing toddler seats, 86 percent of rear-facing infant seats and 85 percent of safety belts, as determined at child passenger safety seat inspection stations across the country.

Child passenger safety technicians have found and corrected numerous installation errors in seats installed by parents and caregivers. To find local inspection stations, go to www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps or www.seatcheck.org.

Research on the effectiveness of child safety seats has found them to reduce fatal injury by 71 percent for infants (less than one year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (one to four years old) in passenger cars. [NHTSA's Traffic Safety Facts 2001 - Children]
Child seats, including booster seats, and safety belts help save kids' lives. Crash fatalities among children age 15 and under decreased by 8.6 percent in 2001. [Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality and Injury Estimates for 2001, National Center for Statistics and Analysis]