



Car Safety for Children with Cerebral Palsy

Children with cerebral palsy may have special needs that can affect how they travel. This brochure answers some questions you may have about transporting your child.

How long should my child ride rear-facing?



Figure 1

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends you keep your child rear-facing until age 2 (*Figure 1*) or until they reach the maximum height and weight for the car safety seat they are using. Since some children with cerebral palsy have poor muscle control, riding rear-facing helps support their entire body and protects them better from injury, especially to the spine. Most new rear-facing only and convertible car safety seats (*Figure 1*) allow children to ride rear-facing up to 35 or 40 pounds.



Figure 2

What car safety seat should I use when I turn my child around?

Use a forward-facing car safety seat that has a 5-point harness until your child outgrows the maximum height or weight allowed by the manufacturer. Many forward-facing car safety seats allow children to remain in a harness system up to 65 pounds or more.

Some car safety seats have a built-in recline or semi-recline (*Figure 2*) feature that may be beneficial for positioning your child. A child passenger safety technician may be able to give you information about car safety seats with more recline. You can find a technician in your area by visiting <http://cert.safekids.org> and clicking on "Find a Tech".

What if my child has trouble sitting up or cannot hold up her head?



Figure 3

If your child fits well in a conventional car safety seat (rear or forward-facing) and needs only minimal additional support, you can place rolled blankets or towels along the side of your child's head or trunk to prevent your child from falling side to side (*Figure 3*). Never put anything behind your child or under the harness.

If your child needs more support for his neck, a soft cervical neck collar (*Figure 3*) can be used to help prevent his head from falling forward. A hard collar should be removed during travel.

Never recline the vehicle seat more than allowed by the vehicle manufacturer.

What if my child is too big for the car seats at the store?



Figure 4

Some children with cerebral palsy outgrow car seats from the store but need additional support due to difficulty holding their body and head up. Your child may need a large medical car safety seat (*Figure 4*). Large medical seats have harnesses for weights as high as 135-150 pounds and offer a variety of accessories, such as head support pads that may meet your child's unique positioning needs.

It is important to work with your child's medical team to determine the best large medical seat for her. Large medical seats are usually ordered through a local durable medical equipment vendor. Insurance or, in some states, Medicaid may cover the cost if proper documentation is provided.

My child has outgrown her large medical car seat. When she is buckled up in a seat belt, she leans to the side or falls over. What should I do?



Figure 5

Your child may be able to use the Churchill, a booster that is made for children with special healthcare needs who weigh 65-175 pounds. The Churchill (*Figure 5*) is a backless booster seat with a positioning vest for larger children who cannot sit up. For more information, contact Merritt Manufacturing at www.eztether.com.

What if my child has casts because of surgery or botox?

Your child will need a car safety seat that has enough room to fit the cast. Your child might be able to use his own car seat but make sure to try it before you leave the hospital. If the cast prevents your child from sitting, your child may need a special child restraint. Ask your child's nurse if there is a special needs car seat program in your area that can help find the right child restraint for your child.

What if my child has pain or pressure areas on her skin when she rides in a car safety seat?

Contact your doctor or rehabilitation therapist to help you determine what is causing the pressure or pain.

Your child may need a different car safety seat that fits better, need to be repositioned in her car safety seat, or need a seat that offers more padding.

Remember, do not add extra padding behind your child's back or under her bottom. Your child's car safety seat might not work as well in a crash.

What if my child uses a wheelchair?

If your child is transported in her wheelchair on the bus or the family vehicle, you can find a detailed brochure at www.travelsafer.org, describing how to use a wheelchair as a transportation device.

Where should I put medical equipment in the car?

Place medical equipment such as apnea monitors and oxygen tanks on the floor of the vehicle wedged with pillows, foam or blankets. Equipment can also be tied down with unused seat belts. There are no straps or belts specifically made for securing equipment in a vehicle. "Some vehicles do not allow putting objects under the front passenger seat as they may interfere with advanced airbag sensors. Check with the vehicle owner's manual."

When can my child ride in the front seat?

The back seat is the safest place for all children 12 years old and under, even if your car does not have an airbag.



Figure 6

How should my child ride in a school bus?

Preschool-age children who weigh less than 40 pounds should use a car safety seat on a school bus. Talk with the school about your child's transportation needs. Make sure they are included in her IEP (Individual Education Plan). She may need to ride in a school bus specific restraint (*Figure 6*), a large medical seat or a wheelchair if she has trouble walking.

How can I be sure my child is buckled up correctly?

Always read and follow the directions that come with your car safety seat and your vehicle owner's manual. You can find a certified child passenger safety technician who is trained in special needs transportation at <http://cert.safekids.org>. Click on "Find a Tech". In the CPS Technician search form, make sure to click "Special Needs" in the Extra Training field. If there is not someone trained in special needs transportation in your area, please call 800-755-0912 for further assistance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
National Center for the Safe Transportation
of Children with Special Healthcare Needs
Indiana University School of Medicine
800-755-0912
www.preventinjury.org

Inclusion of products in this brochure does not imply endorsement.

Figure 2 source: www.gracobaby.com

Figure 5 source: www.eztether.com

Figure 6 source: www.imminet.com



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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