Car seat guidelines & tips

A practical reminder for parents and carers. Your exact seat manual and vehicle handbook decide the fitting details.



Illustration: an adult consulting instructions beside an empty car seat. It does not show installation or harness adjustment.

Before setting off: check the child, the seat, the restraint and the vehicle position. If you cannot confirm a safe fit, get help before travelling.

Short journeys count too

Use the appropriate child restraint for ordinary everyday journeys, not just long trips. Children normally need a suitable child car seat until their 12th birthday or 135 cm tall, whichever comes first. Specific legal exceptions exist; check GOV.UK. [3]

Choosing a seat?

Use the companion Choosing a Car Seat guide to understand measurements, labels and group numbers. This checklist does not recommend a model or certify an installation.

BEFORE EACH JOURNEY

Six checks before you move

1. Check the child and mode

Check the exact seat manual for the child's permitted size range and the selected facing direction or mode. Recheck as your child grows. An age estimate in a shop listing is not a substitute for the seat label. [3]

2. Check the seat installation

Use the exact seat and vehicle instructions. If you moved or removed the seat, check its installation again. Check the applicable belt routing, connectors, tether, support leg or base indicators as the manual directs; arrangements differ. [2]

3. Check the child restraint

Adjust the harness, headrest, shield or vehicle belt exactly as that model requires. Check the buckle is fastened and the restraint is correctly positioned and snug. Do not use a universal shoulder-height rule for every seat. [1]

4. Check clothing and the booster belt

Clothing can affect harness fit, so reassess it each journey. With a booster, check the lap belt lies across the hips/pelvis, not the stomach, and the diagonal belt rests on the shoulder. Never put it under the arm or behind the back. [1]

5. Check the vehicle position

Check that this seat and any base are approved for the intended position in this car. Never put a rear-facing child seat in front of an active passenger airbag. Child car seats must not be fitted on side-facing vehicle seats. [3]

6. Finish before you move

Take time to complete the checks before driving. Every adult should wear their seat belt too. If something will not fit or fasten correctly, do not improvise: get the manufacturer or a trained fitter to help. [1]

Rear-facing reminder: UK rules require height-based seats to remain rear-facing until the child is over 15 months old. That minimum is not a signal to turn them forward: follow the exact seat's approved limits and instructions. [3]

WHEN SOMETHING CHANGES

Pause, check and get help

Instructions missing?

Find the exact model's manual on the manufacturer's website or ask them for a copy. Keep it with the seat. A similar-looking model can have different instructions. [2]

Seat moved to another car?

Check compatibility and installation for that vehicle and seating position. ISOFIX points alone do not prove that every seat or base combination is suitable. [2]

Buckle, belt or seat will not work correctly?

Do not alter the buckle, restraint or vehicle belt to make it work. Resolve the problem with the manufacturer or a trained fitter before travelling with the child in that seat. [1]

Seat or base involved in a collision?

Do not rely on appearance alone. RoSPA advises replacement after a collision, while noting limited exceptions and manufacturer-specific advice. Contact the manufacturer and insurer promptly; if in doubt, replace the seat. [4]

Keep these details with the manual

Seat and base models	_____
Vehicle and seating position	_____
Manual / fitter contact	_____
Date checked and questions	_____

Sources and further help

1. RoSPA: using child car seats
2. RoSPA: fitting child car seats
3. GOV.UK: child car seats - the law
4. RoSPA: replacing a child seat after a crash

Checked 2 November 2026. General UK guidance, not a model-specific installation manual. Follow current official advice and the exact product and vehicle instructions. Illustrations are AI-generated.