

# Anybody can install a child safety seat—or can they?

*100 models of car seats, over 400 vehicle models can leave parents frazzled, children unsafe if wrong combination used*

Parenting is not for the weak-hearted, since that little bundle isn't delivered clutching a "how-to" manual in her chubby hand. Generally, parents learn *how* to parent through trial and error, well-intentioned advice and common sense.

Mistakes are usually minor with no serious consequences to the baby, the carpet or the dog.

However, when it comes to infant safety in vehicles, mistakes can be deadly.

National safety seat stats gathered last year revealed that of the more than 5,500 seats inspected over an 18-month period, 92 per cent were incorrectly, and dangerously, misused. Here at home in Manitoba, the figure has been placed at 80 per cent.

Why are the numbers so high? Most parents are diligent and safety-conscious, taking every precaution to ensure their child's safety. What's going wrong?

Firstly, let's look at logistics. Currently, there are nearly 100 models of safety



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seats on the market. *Some* of those seats properly fit into *some* of the more than 400 different vehicle models on the road, but there is no "one size fits all." Twelve different seat belt systems further complicate matters.

## Huh?

Simply put, if the seat model/vehicle model/seatbelt combination doesn't meet the safety seat's installation requirements, it's not safe.

Secondly, even if the combination does meet specs, the child is still at risk if the seat isn't installed or used properly.

So what can you do? Researching your safety seat purchase and carefully following the installation

instructions are key. And, you'll have to do this with three different seats before your child is old enough to use a seatbelt alone. Here's a rough outline of your "safety seat circuit."

*Stage One:* Bring your newborn home from the hospital in style in a rear-facing safety seat, located in the middle of the back seat. He'll stay there until he weighs more than 9 kg (20 lbs for those who refuse to convert to metric).

*Stage Two:* Your baby has spent many hours sitting backwards and staring at the back of a Corinthian leather seat. Can you blame her for being crabby? Once she reaches the 50 kg/20 lb milestone, move her into a forward-facing seat, again placed in the middle of the back seat. Make sure she's comfortable, as she'll be riding shotgun in it until she's over 18 kg (50 lbs).

*Stage Three:* He's walking, talking, and sporting an attitude he must have picked up from your spouse. Once over 18 kg (50 lbs) he graduates to a booster seat, until he's big enough (and tall

enough) for the seatbelt to fit properly across his chest and hips.

Remember that even when your child no longer requires a safety seat, it's recommended they ride in the back seat until 12 years of age.

Two points I must emphasize:

1. Every forward-facing seat must be tethered to an anchor bolt; it's the law. Most post-1980 vehicle models already come with anchor bolts; if your vehicle doesn't, your dealer can install it for you.
2. Never place a safety seat in front of an airbag. Airbags and safety seats aren't designed to work together, and the combination can cause serious injury or worse.

I am (or rather my son is) in the middle of Stage Two. I can tell you that properly installing and tethering a safety seat for the first time can be a lengthy process. At least it was for me. Of course, I'm a guy, and genetically forbidden from reading the instructions for at least the first hour

of any project. Let's just say that ultimately it was my wife who installed the seat.

## Safety clinics

We took advantage of a safety seat inspection, and I urge you to do the same. MPI provides child safety seat training to fire fighters, community health nurses, law enforcement and other committed groups across the province, who are then able to act as resources for parents in their own community.

To find out if there is a trained volunteer in your area, or for information about child car seat safety or help installing a safety seat, call MPI at 1-888-767-7640.

See you next week. In the meantime, be **RoadWise**.

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