

Booster Seats:

A Simple Solution That Saves Lives



In August 1998, Krista Baker and her three sons were involved in a crash that totaled their car. Only months earlier, Krista received some life-saving advice: Technicians at a child-safety-seat checkup told her that Zachary, her 4-year-old son, should be riding in a booster seat and using it along with an adult lap and shoulder belt. Zachary escaped the crash virtually unharmed.

Unfortunately, Autumn Alexander Skeen did not know the importance of booster seats until it was too late. In 1996, while visiting family in Yakima, Wash., Skeen and her 4-year-old son Anton were both buckled into a sport utility vehicle, using standard lap and shoulder belts. Autumn Skeen was distracted and lost control of the car. The crash caused Anton's small body to slip from the seat belt, and he was thrown from the vehicle as it rolled over. He died instantly.

Skeen thought she was doing the right thing by simply buckling Anton in. What she now knows, but

what most other parents don't realize, is that once children outgrow their convertible child-safety seats, they need to be put in booster seats until the seat-belt system designed for adults fits them correctly.

Traffic crashes are the leading killer for children of every age from 6 to 14 years. This is partly because most kids are unbuckled or improperly restrained in vehicles, and the problem gets worse as the kids get older. From the time their children are born until they are one year old, parents used safety seats 97 percent of the time; from ages one to four, the rate of usage is 91 percent. From age 5 to 15, restraint use falls to 68.7 percent. More than 47 percent of the 4-to-7-year-old children killed weren't wearing seat belts. One study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) showed that only 6.1 percent of booster-aged children were restrained in a booster seat.

NHTSA recommends that all children ages 12 and under ride in the back, properly restrained at all times.

Child-safety seats, including boosters, are effective in keeping kids safe. Parents should use boosters for children once they outgrow forward-facing, child-safety seats at about 40 pounds and around four years old. They should continue to use booster seats until children are 4 feet, 9 inches tall and weigh about 80 pounds.

Parents should have child-safety seats inspected by a certified and trained technician in their community to make sure they are installed correctly. Check your newspaper to see when such "car-seat clinics" are being held in your neighborhood.

For more information on booster seats or to locate a child-safety-seat technician near you, simply click on www.nhtsa.dot.gov/peopole/injury/childps/ or call 1-888-DASH-2-DOT. The Naval Safety Center's web site also has information on child safety seats at http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motor_vehicle/childsafetyseat.html. 