

Is Your Child Buckled in Safely? Give Kids a Boost! Guidelines from the Madison Area SAFE KIDS Coalition

By Nan Peterson

Most parents believe they buckle their kids in correctly, but surprisingly, most times they're wrong. With so many types of child safety seats and seat belt systems, it's hard to be sure child safety seats are in right.

One common mistake is that parents often believe that once their children outgrow their forward-facing child safety seats, an adult seat belt is good enough. A child who cannot sit with his or her back straight against the vehicle seat back cushion, with knees bent over a vehicle's seat edge without slouching, must use a booster seat.

The reality is that all children between about 40 to 80 pounds and less than 4'9" should be in a booster seat. Adult seat belts can be dangerous when used alone if the child is too small. The shoulder belt cuts across their necks and the lap belt rides up into their soft bellies. In a crash, this can cause serious or even fatal injuries. Wisconsin now has a booster seat law that is for children from ages 4 up to age 8 who weigh between 40 and 80 pounds and are no more than 57 inches tall.

For these children, booster seats are critical. Child safety seats – including boosters – are very effective in protecting children in crashes. A booster seat positions the adult-designed seat belt correctly and safely, and offers children greater comfort and visibility.

All children age 12 and under should sit properly restrained in the back seat. So when your kids outgrow forward-facing child safety seats, boost 'em before you buckle 'em. And be sure to have your child safety seats inspected by a certified technician in your area.

To make an appointment to have your child safety seat inspected, call SAFE KIDS at 890-8999. For additional information on Wisconsin's new booster seat law and tips for getting your "tween", or 8 – 15 year old, to be a safe passenger, check out Safe Communities' website at www.safercommunity.net (click on "Traffic Safety" and then "Tweens").