Child Passenger Safety

Children should always be buckled up or in a proper child restraint for their age, size and weight. Read on to make sure you know the Florida safety belt law and important safety tips for children of all ages.

Car Seats and Booster Seats:
The best child seat is one that fits your child, fits your car and that drivers will use correctly every time. The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration has resources to help parents and caregivers including an easy-to-use tool that lets you find the right car seat to fit your child found at www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats. Read the car seat's instruction manual and the portion of your vehicle's owner manual when you install a car seat. Remember to check regularly for car seat and booster seat recalls.

Florida law requires:
‣ Children age 5 and under to be secured properly in a crash-tested, federally approved child restraint device.
‣ Children ages 0 to 3 must be in child restraint devices or a vehicle manufacturer's integrated child seat.
‣ Children age 4 and 5 must be in an integrated child seat or booster seat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and many child safety experts urge parents to exceed the requirements of the law and follow these guidelines:
‣ Infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car safety seat as long as possible, until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their seat. (This changes previous guidance that children should ride rear-facing until age 2.)
‣ Once they are facing forward, children should use a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness for as long as possible, until they reach the height and weight limits for their seats.
‣ When children exceed these limits, they should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's lap and shoulder seat belt fits properly. This is often when they have reached at least 4 feet 9 inches in height and are 8 to 12 years old.
‣ When children are old enough and large enough to use the vehicle seat belt alone, they should always use lap and shoulder seat belts for optimal protection.

Children under the age of 13 should ride in the back seat of the vehicle whenever possible for additional safety. Front-seat air bags can be dangerous to children.

Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) has certified troopers who can help ensure your child is in a suitable seat and you are using it properly. Visit https://www.flhsmv.gov/florida-highway-patrol/troop-boundaries-information/ to find the FHP station near you and call to set up an appointment.

Safety Belts
‣ Buckle up! A seat belt is your vehicle's most important safety feature, but it only works if you use it.
‣ Florida law requires the use of seat belts or child restraint devices by drivers of motor vehicles, all front seat passengers and all children riding in a vehicle under 18.
‣ Children should be in the rear seats until at least age 12, since deployed front seat air bags can be dangerous to children.

Never Leave a Child in a Hot Car
‣ Never leave a child unattended or unsupervised in a motor vehicle. It is extremely hot, especially in Florida during the summer and can result in the child's injury or death.
‣ Florida law states that children under six should never be left in a motor vehicle for longer than 15 minutes or for any period of time if the motor is running, the health of the child is in danger or if the child appears to be in distress. A violation of this law is a second-degree misdemeanor and can result in a fine of up to $500. If a child is injured, the violation becomes a third-degree felony.

Many children may need booster seats beyond the age required by law, depending on the size of the child and where the seat belt crosses the body.

Use this checklist to determine if your child is ready to wear a seatbelt without a booster seat:

The child is at least 4'9" tall.

The child can sit all the way back in the seat and bend knees at the edge of the seat.

The shoulder belt lays across the child's chest, not the neck.

The lap belt lays across the child's upper thighs, not the stomach.

When all recommendations are met, your child is likely ready to wear a seatbelt without a booster seat.