



Car Safety for Your Child with Autism

Children with autism may have special needs that can cause challenges during travel. This brochure answers some questions you might have about transporting your child safely.



What should I do if my child gets out of her car safety seat, booster or seat belt?



Figure 1

- Pull your car off the road where it is safe and re-fasten her car safety seat or seat belt. If possible it may help to have someone sit next to her in the back seat.
- Make sure the car safety seat fits your child correctly. Harness straps that are loose or through the wrong set of slots could make it easier to get out of the seat. The harness should fit snuggly and without any slack. Forward facing, the harness should be through the slots at or above your child's shoulders (Figure 1). Read the car safety seat instructions to make sure you are using the harness the right way for your child.
- If your child opens the car safety seat's chest clip, you may need to try other car safety seats that have different types of clips (Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2



Figure 3

- If your child gets out of her booster seat or seat belt, try a car safety seat that can still be used with a harness. A harness (Figure 1) will hold your child better than a booster seat or seat belt. A car seat with a harness is harder to escape than a booster seat or a seat belt. Visit the website www.healthychildren.org for a list of forward facing seats that have a harness to higher weights.
- Other types of restraints, such as large medical seats or vests (Figure 4 and 6), might work better for your child. Some will need to be ordered with the help of a healthcare professional. Talk with your child's medical team or call 800-755-0912 to learn more about these options.

I've tried everything but my child consistently escapes her child restraint. What can I do?

- If your child consistently resists the use of a child restraint, you may consider a special needs seat that offers features that may help prevent your child from escaping the restraint.
- A few large medical seats offer features that make it difficult for children to undo the harness or chest clip. These products have been crash-tested to be used with a specific large medical seats. For example, the Roosevelt car seat has the chest clip guard (Figure 4) and buckle guard (Figure 5).
- Call the National Center for the Safe Transportation of Children with Special Healthcare Needs at 800-755-0912 for details about specialized seats.



Figure 4



Figure 5

- Using an E-Z-On Vest (Figure 6) with a vehicle floor mount tether (Figure 7) may help keep your child restrained in the car. This restraint can be used with a vehicle bucket or bench seat. You have to get special hardware placed in your vehicle. Contact E-Z-On at www.ezonpro.com to see if the floor mount tether will work in your vehicle.



Figure 6



Figure 7

- If your child unbuckles the car seat's harness or chest clip, do not place anything over the harness unless it has been crash tested with that particular seat.

My child likes stories. Do you have a story about car safety seats?

Ask your child's speech therapist to write a special story for your child. The following story is an example:

RIDING IN THE CAR

When we go places, we ride in the car.

When we get in the car, we always have to keep our car seat buckled. Keeping the car seat buckled makes us safe.

When I keep my car seat buckled, I will get to play with my favorite toys. Maybe I will even get to pick the toy(s) that I want! Making good choices makes my mom and dad happy. When my mom and dad are

happy, this makes me happy.

Unbuckling my car seat or trying to get out of my car seat is not good.

When I do something that is not good, my mom and dad are sad. When my mom and dad are sad, this makes me sad.

It is better to be good in the car so that I get to do fun things. I need to remember to keep my car seat buckled every time I ride in the car.

Would a behavior plan help keep my child from getting out of her car safety seat or seat belt?

- **Yes.** Consistent use of a behavior plan may help prevent your child from escaping her car seat. Ask your behavioral psychologist, therapist, or pediatrician to help you make a behavior plan you can follow every ride.

What should be in a behavior plan?

- **Teach your child what you expect when riding in the car**

Tell your child what the rules are when in the car. You may need to work with your speech therapist if your child has speech delays in order to communicate the behavior and reward. Take a photo with your smart phone or camera to show your child what it is like to be buckled up correctly.

- **Praise and reward your child**

Praise your child for good behaviors and offer rewards your child likes. Give your child a reward such as a sticker for staying buckled up. At first, you may need to give your child more rewards, more often. For example, give her a sticker every time you come to a stoplight or every minute she follows the plan. Gradually increase the amount of time between rewards until she receives one reward for a full trip.

Let her choose the reward she will earn by following the plan. You may need to use a choice board with things that your child likes. Consider a special toy that she can only have in the car, such as a soft book, soft toy, or CD of her favorite songs. (Hard toys could hurt your child in a crash.) As your child becomes too used to the toys, replace them with different ones.

- **Be consistent**

Make sure everyone who travels with your child uses the same behavior plan every time the child rides in the car. Follow the plan every trip.

- **Set Boundaries/Discipline**

Set limits for behaviors that are okay and not okay when riding in the car and stick to them. Praise and reward good behaviors immediately. Ignore behaviors that are not dangerous.

My child is bothered by light touch and complains when in her child restraint. What should I do?

Make sure the harness, vest or seat belt is snug, flat and not twisted against the child's body. Also, make sure the harness is touching your child's clothes and not her skin. Tight fitting underclothes or a compression vest may help prevent irritating light touch.

What if my child moves a lot in the car during travel?

Make sure your child has a chance to move around throughout the day or before getting into the car. Running, jumping, and hopping are movements your child could do before riding in the car. If possible, stop during your trip and let your child move. Some children like to wear a compression vest which may be calming and help to decrease movement during travel.

What if my child screams when she hears loud noises such as sirens?

Teach your child to cover her ears or wear headphones (Figure 8) to block out loud sounds. Explain to your child the reason for loud sounds to help him understand.



Figure 8

What if my child chews on the harness?

Lightweight chew toys may help stop chewing on clothes, harnesses, or car safety seat covers. You can purchase chew toys at stores that sell special needs products.

When can my child ride in the front seat?

The back seat is the safest place for all children 12 years and under, even if your car does not have an airbag.

How can I be sure my child is buckled up correctly?

Always read and follow the directions that come with your car safety seat and your vehicle owner's manual. You can find a certified child passenger safety technician who is trained in special needs transportation at <http://cert.safekids.org>. Click on "Find a Tech." In the CPS Technician search form, make sure to click "Special Needs" in the Extra Training field. If there is not someone trained in special needs transportation in your area, please call 800-755-0912 for further assistance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

National Center for the Safe Transportation of Children with Special Healthcare Needs

800-755-0912

www.preventinjury.org





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