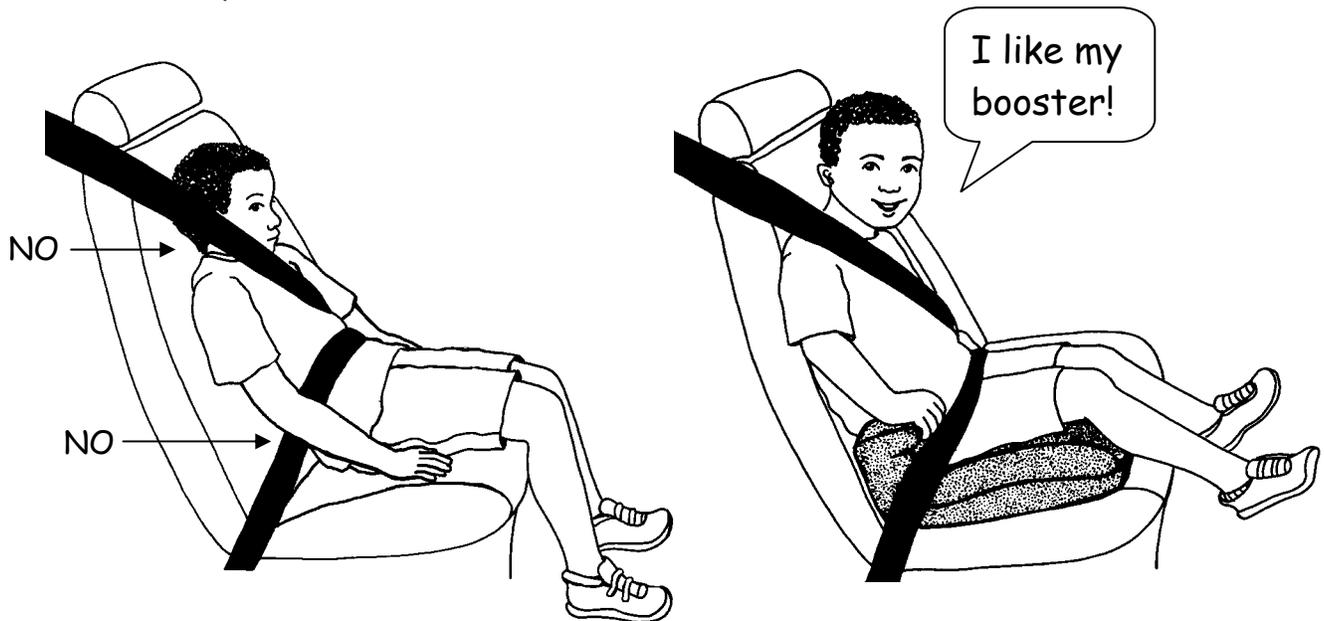


# Boosters Are For Big Kids

Most kids need to ride in a booster seat from about age 4 until at least age 8.

If your child isn't using a booster, try the simple test below the next time you ride together in the car. You'll probably find that your child is not yet ready to use a safety belt without a booster.



## The 5-Step Test

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to make both the shoulder belt and the lap belt fit right for the best crash protection. Your child will be more comfortable, too!

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.** P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)  
310/222-6860, 800/745-SAFE (English) 310/222-6862, 800/747-SANO (Spanish)

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## Does Your Child Need a Booster Seat?

Young children who are placed in vehicle belts rather than car seats or booster seats are four times more likely to suffer devastating injuries, including severe damage to the brain, liver, spleen, and spinal cord. Most children need to use a booster seat from about age four up to at least age eight for maximum protection and improved comfort in the car.

### **Q-My child is five years old. Isn't she old enough to use a regular safety belt now?**

A-No. Vehicle seats and belts are designed for adult bodies. The booster raises the child up, which helps keep the lap belt on the upper thighs and the shoulder belt centered on the shoulder and chest.

### **Q-Why is it important for children who have outgrown car seats to use boosters?**

A-Using a booster instead of a vehicle belt reduces risk of injury by 59%. Children over four have a higher rate of injury than younger children for several reasons. Many of them place the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back. They tend to ride out of position, either sliding forward to the edge of the vehicle seat or slouching downward. Fewer children in this age group are buckled up, perhaps because vehicle seats and belts are not comfortable for them.

### **Q-How can I tell when my child has outgrown his car seat?**

A-Children should ride in safety seats with a complete harness system as long as possible. Most seats with a harness fit children up to 40 pounds, but a tall, thin child may be too tall for a "convertible" seat, the type that faces either rearward or forward, before reaching the maximum weight. If the child's shoulders are above the top slots, try a combination child seat/booster with higher strap slots. The harness may be used up to 40-50 pounds, depending on the model. The harness is then removed, and the seat can be used as a belt-positioning booster up to 80 pounds or more.

### **Q-What about children who outgrow their safety seats before age four?**

A-Most 2-year-olds and many 3-year-olds are too immature to sit still in a booster with a lap and shoulder belt, which allows them to lean forward or sideways. Parents should consider getting a larger seat or a tethered harness system for younger or more active children who outgrow their safety seats.

### **Q-What about cars with only lap belts in the back seat?**

A-Never use a booster with only a lap belt! Although two shoulder belts have been required in vehicle back seats since 1989, many families have cars with lap-only belts in the center or older cars with no rear shoulder belts. Call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. or go to [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org) for information about safety seats to fit larger children (#627) and shoulder belt retrofit kits available from vehicle dealers.

### **Q-Should I use a booster with a shield or get one of those adjusters that attaches to the belt?**

A-None of the boosters with shields pass current federal safety standards (effective September, 1996) for children over 40 pounds. Belt-positioning devices, such as clips or fabric sleeves that connect the shoulder and lap portions of the belt, are not required to meet federal safety standards. Tests by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration showed that they reduced effectiveness of the shoulder belt. They also tend to pull the lap portion of the belt up on the soft tummy area.

### **Q-How can I tell when my child is big enough to use the vehicle belt without a booster?**

A-It depends on the height of the child, the shape of the vehicle seat, and where the belts are attached to the vehicle. The shoulder belt should cross the center of the shoulder and chest. The lap portion of the belt should be low and snug, crossing the hip bones or upper thighs. Check that your child's legs are long enough so the knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat. Otherwise, the child will tend to slide forward to the edge of the seat or slouch downward, which can cause the lap belt to ride up too high. Finally, make sure the child sits all the way back and stays properly seated **throughout the trip**.

**(Over) Try the 5-Step Test to find out if your child needs a booster seat.**