



CONVERSATIONS IN CARE

A Practical Guide for CHWs and Care Teams
Rooted in Trust and Respect

Car Seat Safety

Why it matters

Car seat safety is one of the most important ways to protect babies while traveling in a vehicle. The correct use of a car seat reduces the risk of injury or death in a crash, even at low speeds, and is required by law in all states. Every ride matters: from the very first trip home from the hospital to short errands close to home.

This conversation guide aims to support providers in delivering information with compassion, creating a safe and respectful environment, and connecting families to the resources and support they need as they begin to navigate their journey.

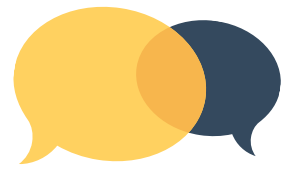


Before the conversation

- Create a safe, respectful environment.
- Ask about what the family already knows or believes.
- Acknowledge that some words, beliefs, or traditions may be different, and that it is okay.
- At first, listen more than speak.



Frequently Asked Questions



Questions

Answers

What is a car seat?

A car seat is a specially designed seat for infants and children that keeps them safe and secure in a vehicle. It is made to protect the baby's head, neck, and body during sudden stops or crashes.



Tip: Use simple visuals to show the parts of a car seat (harness, chest clip, base). Explain that car seats are different from regular chairs or strollers as they are engineered for safety in a car.

Why do we use a car seat?

Babies and young children are too small to be protected by regular seat belts. Car seats:

- Reduce the risk of serious injury or death in a crash,
- Keep babies secure and properly positioned, and
- Help caregivers follow the law since car seats are required by law in all states.



Tip: Emphasize that car seat-use is lifesaving; it is the law and is not optional. Explain that crashes can happen even at low speeds; every ride matters.

When should I get a car seat?

Families should have a car seat ready before the baby is born so the baby can be safely transported home from the hospital.



Tip: Encourage families to install and practice using the car seat before delivery. Connect families to local resources if cost or availability is a concern.



Questions

Answers

When should my baby start using a car seat?

Babies should use a car seat from the first ride home from the hospital. Every ride, no matter how short, requires the baby to be secured in a proper car seat.



Tip: Emphasize that car seat-use is essential even for short trips. Encourage families to make the car seat part of their daily routine.

What type of car seat should my baby use?

Infants should be placed in a rear-facing car seat until at least age 2 or until they reach the seat's height/weight limit. Rear-facing seats support the head, neck, and spine in a crash.



Tip: Show families rear-facing seats in the correct position. Explain that convertible seats can transition to a forward-facing position when the baby outgrows the rear-facing limits.

How should I install the car seat?

Place the seat rear-facing in the back seat, preferably in the middle, if possible. Use either the LATCH system or the seat belt, following instructions carefully.



Tip: Encourage a car seat check at local fire stations, hospitals, or community centers. Offer hands-on demonstration or review instructions in plain language.



Questions

Answers

How should my baby be secured in the car seat?

Harness straps at, or just below, the shoulders, Straps snug enough that you cannot pinch any extra webbing, Chest clip at armpit level, Remove coats, blankets, or bulky clothing under straps.



Tip: Demonstrate the pinch test and chest clip placement. Explain that loose straps or bulky clothing reduce effectiveness in a crash.

Are second-hand or used car seats safe?

Some used seats are safe, but avoid seats that:

- Have missing parts or damage,
- Are expired (usually six to 10 years from the manufacturer), or
- Have been in a crash or have an unknown crash history.



Tip: Provide families with resources for safe, low-cost, or free car seats. Encourage checking recall lists before using a used seat.

What are common mistakes to avoid?

- Placing the seat in the front seat with an active airbag.
- Loose installation or harness straps.
- Chest clip too low or straps twisted.
- Using unapproved accessories.



Tip: Use visuals to show proper versus improper use. Normalize asking for help as installation can be tricky and guidance is available.

Note: These questions and responses were gathered from community members and developed with their voices and cultural insight. For more information or resources, visit MCD's Strengthening Patient Care webpage: mcd.org/technical-assistance-training/strengthening-patient-care