

HOW TO: Choose The Right Car Seat

One of the most important decisions you will make when you have a baby is choosing a car seat. With safety of paramount importance and so many different car seats available on the market, it can be confusing for a first-time (or even a second- or third-time parent!) to know which car seat is right for their child. That is why the team at Babies R Us have put together the ultimate car seat buying guide – plus, we have listed some of the very best car seats for 2021.



What are the most important factors to consider when choosing a car seat?

Fit is the first thing to consider when buying a car seat – does the car seat fit your child, your car and your budget? The next thing to take into consideration is which stage of development your child is in. There are three types of car seats – rear-facing, front-facing and booster seats – and each is used at a particular stage in your child's life, based on their height, weight and age. Your child will have outgrown their car seat when they reach the specified upper height, weight or age limit, and it is dangerous to continue using the seat thereafter.

Why car seats are important?

A car seat can reduce the risk of your child dying in an accident by up to 71% and can reduce the risk of them needing hospitalisation by 69%. In South Africa, it is illegal to travel in a car with a child under the age of three unless they are strapped into an approved child safety seat – and safety guidelines recommend that children make use of some form of car seat up until the age of 12, or when they reach 1,5 metres tall.

How much does a car seat cost?

One of the most Googled questions when it comes to buying a car seat for a child is: 'What is the best and safest inexpensive car seat?' The answer is that you should always purchase the best car seat you can afford.

Will it fit in your car?

Before going shopping for a car seat, measure the back seat of your car so you know exactly what dimensions you have to work with. Also take into consideration how many children you have who need car seats, who else will be sitting in the back seat (safety guidelines recommend that children under the age of 13 always be seated in the rear of the vehicle) and whether your car has Isofix anchor points.



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What type of car seat do you need?

The type of car seat you choose will depend on your child's age, weight and height. You will likely need:

An infant seat. This is a rear-facing car seat that is suitable from birth until your child is around 15 months old or weighs 13kg.

A toddler seat. This is a forward-facing car seat for children who weigh a minimum of 9kg and a maximum of 18kg, or from when they are around 15 months old until they turn four. Although a child weighing over 9kg is legally allowed to be in a forward-facing seat, rear-facing seats are considered safer so parents are advised to keep children rear-facing for as long as possible.

A booster seat. This is a forward-facing car seat that a child uses from the age of four until they are at least 1,5 metres tall, which usually happens at around 12 years of age.

There are some car seats that cover a range of ages and weights, for example, from birth until 25kg, but always check the weight, height and age limits of any seat before you buy it.

How do I know my child is in the right size car seat?

To check if your child is in the correct size car seat, take note of where the harness and seatbelt sits. In rear-facing seats the harness should sit at – or just below – the child's shoulder. In forward-facing car seats the harness should sit at – or just above – the child's shoulder.

A harness or seatbelt should not be twisted and must fit snugly, although you should still be able to place your hand between your child's stomach and the seat buckle. If you are not sure if they have outgrown their car seat, use this basic rule of thumb: the top of your child's ear should never be visible above the headrest.

How do I know my child's car seat is safe?

In South Africa we follow European car seat regulations, meaning that all car seats need to pass one of two safety tests: either the ECE R44/04 or the ECE R129. In order to be legally sold here, car seats also need to be approved by the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) – you can check if a car seat is on their approved list by clicking [HERE](https://www.nrscs.org.za/content.asp?subID=60)

Install and use the car seat correctly according to the instructions set out in the manual – most brands now also post installation videos on YouTube. No matter what the safety rating is on a car seat, if it is installed incorrectly it is NOT safe. See our tips below on how to safely install a car seat.



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What's the difference between the ECE R44/04 and the ECE R129 safety ratings?

The ECE R44/04 rating has been around for longer and involves choosing a car seat based on your child's weight. The ECE R129 (also known as i-Size) rating is newer, having been introduced in 2013, and you choose a seat using your child's height, not their weight.

The primary difference between the safety ratings is that the newer ECE R129 seats have undergone side-impact safety testing, while the ECE R44/04 seats have undergone only front- and rear-impact collision safety tests.

These are the orange labels to look out for – do not buy a car seat that does not have one of these two labels on it:



The E-number in the circle represents the country code – in South Africa our code is E37.

While both types of car seats are currently legal and acceptable to use in South Africa, it's likely the ECE R44/04 rating will be phased out over the next few years.

What is an Iso-fix car seat?

Isofix is a fitting system that allows a car seat to be attached to the frame of your car using Isofix-specific connectors. You have to have Isofix anchor points in your car in order to make use of an i-Size seat, while ECE R44/04 seats can be installed using the car's seatbelt. There is less chance of a seat being installed incorrectly when using Isofix but, when installed and used properly, there is no difference in safety between Isofix seats and those that make use of the car's seatbelt.



Additional safety measures when travelling with a child:

- Always secure your child in a car seat, even if you are 'just going around the corner'.
- Never use a car seat where there are active air bags. Airbags deploy at a speed of around 350km/h and can seriously injure your child and even cause death. Remember to deactivate the air bags.
- Children under the age of 13 should always sit in the back seat.
- Car seats are not designed for long periods of sleep.
- Do not place your baby in their car seat if they are wrapped in a blanket. Instead, place a blanket over the entire seat.

How to safely install a car seat:

An incorrectly installed car seat is NOT safe. Always follow the installation instructions in the manual, and use these guidelines:

- When using a forward-facing seat, there will be red guides on the plastic body of the car seat to show where the seatbelt should go.
- Blue guides on a seat show where the seatbelt goes when using a rear-facing seat.
- When installing a seat with the vehicle seatbelt, make sure there are no twists in the seatbelt, and that you remove all slack from it.
- If you are using an Isofix anchor point, listen for a click and check for the marker that shows the seat is firmly in place.
- Once it is installed, give the car seat a shake at the base – you should not be able to move it more than 3 centimetres.

