

Child car seats and the law

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From the 18th September 2006, children must be transported in the correct car seat for your child.

Further regulations will come into force:

From May 2008, all child restraints must comply with the UN ECE 44.03 standard (or subsequent versions eg 44.04). Child seats to the 44.03 standard have been on sale for many years.

What is the new law?

Children under 3 years must use the child restraint appropriate for their weight in any vehicle (including vans and other goods vehicles). There is only one exception:

A child under three may travel unrestrained in the rear of a taxi if the right child restraint is not available. Rear facing baby seats **MUST NOT** be used in a seat protected by a frontal air-bag unless the air-bag has been deactivated manually or automatically.

In vehicles where seat belts are fitted, children 3 years to 135 cms in height (approx 4ft 5ins) **MUST** use the appropriate child restraint.

Three exceptions allow these children to travel in the rear and use an adult belt:

- in a taxi, if the right child restraint is not available;
- for a short distance in an unexpected necessity, if the right child restraint is not available;
- where two occupied child seats in the rear prevent the fitment of a third child seat.

This table is a summary of these new rules for cars, vans and goods vehicles.

Front seat
Rear seat
Who is responsible?

Child up to 3 years old
The correct child restraint **MUST** be used
Correct child restraint **MUST** be used.

If a restraint is not available in a licensed taxi/private hire vehicle, the child may travel unrestrained.
Driver

Child from 3rd birthday up to 135cms in height (approx 4' 5") (or 12th birthday whichever they reach first)

The correct child restraint MUST be used

Where seat belts are fitted, the correct child restraint MUST be used. The child must use adult belt if the correct child restraint is not available as follows:

- in a licensed taxi or private hire vehicle; or
- for a short distance in an unexpected necessity; or
- two occupied child restraints prevent fitment of a third.

A child 3 years and over may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a vehicle if seat belts are not fitted in the rear.

Driver

Child over 1.35 metres (approx 4' 5") in height or 12 or 13 years old

Seat belt MUST be worn if available.

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Driver

Passengers aged 14 years old and over

Seat belt MUST be worn if available.

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Passenger

The penalty for not using a child restraint is a £30 fixed penalty notice and if the case goes to court, the maximum fine is £500.

Why aren't adult seat belts okay for older children?

Adult seat belts are best for people with an adult bone structure. Children need to use child seats and boosters to be safe - they put them in the right position to use the seat belt properly.

The lap belt of an adult seat belt needs to go as low as possible over the stomach. A child needs to be boosted up so the adult belt fits properly. If not, the adult belt sits too high over the stomach and in a crash there is a risk of damage to internal organs as well as sliding under the belt.

What about travelling in taxis?

Taxis cannot be expected to have the right child seat or booster unless parents have brought one with them. If child seats

or boosters are not available in a taxi: under 3's may travel unrestrained in the rear only; those 3 years and above must use an adult belt in the rear only.

What if I can't fit 3 child seats in the back of my car?

If a car has 3 seat belts in the rear, and 2 occupied child seats or boosters prevent the fitting of a third, a third child 3 years or over may then use an adult belt. If there is room, it would be safer for the third child to travel in the front seat and use the correct child seat or booster.

How do I choose the right one and how much will that cost?

There is a range of products and prices. All the major shops selling child seats have information on their websites, including prices. Child seat types depend upon the weight of the child and if you need help, most retailers of child restraints will have trained staff that can help in choosing the right one. Most seats will fit most cars but the advice is to try before you buy.

How to persuade your child to use a child car seat/booster

Encourage you child to buy the car seat and get them to choose the colour/pattern they like best so that they have 'ownership' of the seat.

If you have older children, explain why they need to sit in the seat. Explain that it is for their own safety and that you wouldn't like to see them get hurt.

Make it part of the routine of getting into the car. If your children are young, use your imagination to see the seat as rocket ship or racing car etc.

Get your child to name their seat!

For more information, please go to <http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk/campaigns/childcarseats/childcarseats.htm> or alternatively:

- Download the Law Leaflet