



Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Happy Trails: Tips and Tricks for Fun and Safe Travel With Kids

Brittney Schrick, Ph.D., Assistant Professor - Family Life

Target Audience

- EHC Members
- Parents, Grandparent Groups

Objectives

Participants will be:

- Able to choose an appropriate car seat for travel with children.
- Able to choose safe and healthy snacks for travel with children.
- Able to search for qualified car seat technicians in their area.
- Familiar with laws and regulations related to car travel with children and teens.
- Equipped with games and other tools to help children on long car trips.

Advanced Preparation

- **Materials Needed:** PowerPoint presentation (projector and screen) and/or printed info from safercar.gov (pages 1-8).
- **Study content prior to teaching session.**

Travel with kids can be fun, stressful and, at times, very difficult. But, it is also necessary to get from point A to point B safely. Whether you're taking children down the street or across the country, there are several things to remember to make traveling with children safer and easier.

Car Seat Safety (Show slide or give printed copy of CDC car seat chart)

- The chart from the CDC gives basic information on which car seat is right for your child based on their age and height.
- Older recommendations stated that a child could move from a rear-facing to a forward-facing car seat at age 1 and 20 pounds. Current recommendations say at least age 2, but children are safer rear-facing for as long as their seat is safe to do so (until the child reaches the upper weight and height limit for their seat). Many newer seats go up to 45 pounds while rear facing.

- We will discuss each of these seats in turn. If you are unsure how to install your car seat correctly, **please contact a certified car seat technician**. This will be discussed later in this presentation.

Rear-Facing Car Seats (Slide 5)

- Infants under age 2 should be in a rear-facing seat. These seats may be carrier/bucket seats that have a base that stays installed in the car, or they may be convertible car seats that stay installed in the car and may be turned to face forward when the child meets age, height and weight requirements.
- When buckling a child into a rear-facing seat, check the tightness of the straps and the position of the chest clip. If your child is in a carrier/bucket seat, lower the handle behind the seat when clicking the seat into its already installed base.
- (Click 1) In this photo, the carrier/bucket seat's strap is tight. It will pass the "pinch test," meaning that I could not grab the strap and pinch the slack.
- (Click 2) The chest clip is at armpit level. It should not be so high as to hit the child in the neck, and it should not be at stomach or diaphragm. Right at armpit level, straight across the chest is the safest to avoid internal injury.
- (Click 3) The bottom strap allows for tightening and release of the shoulder straps. Be sure to use this feature. All seats with a 5-point harness, like this one, will have a way to adjust the tightness of the straps. If you are using a bucket seat and you take the seat out in order to carry the child, be sure you tighten the straps when you put the seat back in the car if you have loosened them for the child's comfort. Additionally, do **NOT** put a carrier seat on top of a shopping cart. This causes the shopping cart to be top-heavy and can cause severe injury if the cart tips over.
- (Click 4) Familiarize yourself with the seat before you use it. If you are traveling with a grandchild, niece or nephew, or other child using an unfamiliar seat, be sure to ask questions to make sure you are comfortable enough to use the seat properly.
- Convertible infant seats are slightly different in installation, but the features described above are the same. With very small infants, you may have difficulty tightening the straps and keeping the chest clip at armpit level, but get as close as you can and as tight as you can. Many newer seats come with an insert that helps boost a newborn high enough to allow for proper belt position.

Forward-Facing Car Seats (Slide 6)

- Updated recommendations for forward-facing car seats say that children should stay rear-facing until at least age 2, but for as long as possible based on the weight and height limits of the seat being used. Following these recommendations with an appropriate seat increases the likelihood that a child will make it safely through most car accidents with only minor injuries. Many parents worry about their older child rear-facing with their legs being uncomfortable. Most children will cross their legs or find a comfortable position while rear-facing. Staying rear-facing longer protects against spinal injuries.
- A change in installation occurs at the transition to forward-facing. (Click 1) The car seat will need to be tethered in the back.

- Most convertible seats have a rear-facing limit of at least 45 pounds, and some go as high as 65 pounds. (Click 2) If the child is taller than the seat (their head comes above the top of the seat), it is time to upgrade to a different seat.
- When you decide to turn a child forward-facing, the (Click 3) pinch test and (Click 4) chest clip rules still apply. The straps should be tight enough that the child cannot move around or wiggle out of them, and the chest clip should be at armpit level.
- For children in rear- or forward-facing car seats, always remove a child's winter coat before tightening straps. If it is cold in the car, remove the coat, tighten their straps, and put their coat on backward on TOP of the straps. This also allows the child to remove their coat without taking them out of their seat if they get hot.

Booster Seats (Slide 7)

- Moving to a booster seat is appropriate when a child is 5 or older and will sit properly in a seatbelt (i.e., they won't put it behind their back or under their arms, and they will sit up in the car).
- (Click 1) Some booster seats have a belt positioner that keeps the seatbelt off of the child's neck. This will increase the likelihood that they will keep the belt in the correct position.
- (Click 2) The booster raises the child to the correct height for the seatbelt to fit them by lying flat across their chest and hips.
- Another option for this age group or as a transition between a forward facing and booster seat is a high-backed booster seat. They typically still have a 5-point harness, but they sit flatter and often have an adjustable head rest to fit the height of the child. This option is especially good for children who struggle to sit properly in their seatbelt.

Seat Belt Only (Slide 8)

- When a child is 8 years or older (depending on height), they may be ready to sit in the seat alone. Before setting out, be sure to check for seatbelt position:
- (Click 1) The belt should lay flat across the child's chest and not dig into their neck,
- (Click 2) and it should lay across their hips or upper thighs **NOT** their stomach.
- (Click 3) They should be able to sit with their knees bent over the edge of the seat without slouching down. If they are not yet able to do this, they should continue using a booster seat until they are tall enough for the seatbelt to fit them properly.
- Children should still ride without putting the seatbelt behind them or under their arms.

Car Seat Safety (Slide 9)

- (Click 1) When choosing or installing a car seat, it is important to use only the parts that come with the seat itself. After-market items like pads, head positioners, toys, and boutique seat covers are cute, and some are helpful, but they often interfere with the proper function of the car seat (many keep the straps from tightening effectively), and some may invalidate the manufacturer warranty.
- (Click 2) Any car seat that was installed in a car that experienced an accident should be replaced. Even if it looks fine, the frame or other materials may have been stressed or cracked during impact.

- (Click 3) Be sure to observe all warnings posted on car seats and to properly dispose of them by their expiration dates. Car seat materials are rated to be safe for a specific period of time. After that time, the manufacturer does not guarantee safety, even if it is installed correctly. For this reason, avoid buying car seats at yard sales or consignment shops (even if they will be “spares”). Most car insurance agents and some hospitals offer sources for affordable or free car seats if you cannot afford one.
- (Click 4) All children under age 12 should sit buckled in the **back seat**.
- (Click 5) When children are old enough, heavy and tall enough, to move to the front seat, they must still wear seatbelts correctly.
- It is important to model safe behaviors. Be sure to wear your own seatbelt while driving or riding in a car! Kids will do what they see.

Car Seat Technicians (Slide 10)

- If you would like someone to check your child’s car seat installation, car seat technicians are trained to check and install car seats. Visit <http://cert.safekids.org/> for a searchable database. It will give you contact information for car seat technicians in your area.

Sun Safety in the Car (Slide 11)

- Another car safety issue to be aware of is the sun.
- (Click 1) Especially if you are traveling a long distance, check sun exposure throughout the day. Babies and young children are especially sensitive to sun exposure, so it may be a good idea to put sunscreen on, even if you will be in the car, if you do not have tinted windows. For very young babies, long sleeves, long pants, socks, and a hat and/or a sun shade that attaches to the window are all good ways to protect them from sunburn in the car.
- (Click 2) Older children will likely do their best to avoid the sun, but if they nap in the sun, it is best to cover the window or cover the child with sunscreen, clothes, or a blanket, if windows are not tinted.

Hot Car Safety (Slide 12)

- Another car safety issue when traveling with children is knowing how to prevent injury or death from a hot car. We have all driven somewhere on autopilot and realize we missed our turn, went the wrong direction, or just don’t quite remember driving so far. Especially in cases where we are out of our routine, such as taking a child to school that we are normally not responsible for or going somewhere with our child who is usually at school or daycare, it is not uncommon to forget where we are going or why. When we are alone, this is, at worst, inconvenient. If we have a child with us, it could be dangerous. Forgetting about a child in the car is an all too common occurrence. The majority of these cases are not of bad parents who intended their child harm, they are of good parents who were out of their routine.
- (Click 1 and 2) Children, especially very young children, are in danger of heat stroke or death when left in a hot car for even a brief period of time (as little as 10 to 15 minutes in direct sunlight). The danger of this happening increases with rear-facing car seats because the driver cannot see the child when looking in the rearview mirror. Another danger for young babies is that they may fall asleep or be very quiet so the driver does not remember they are in the car.

- The main stories we hear in the news of hot car deaths and injuries involve parents who forgot their child in a hot car or left them in their car seat unattended while they ran an errand; however, many children who die or are injured in hot cars climb in the car or trunk themselves while the car is parked. They may be playing in the car or using it as a hiding place. Most older children will get out on their own, but a younger child may become trapped because they are unable to open the door, they accidentally lock themselves in, or they close the trunk and cannot open it from the inside. It is a good habit to lock cars while they are parked and to teach children not to play in or around cars to avoid these dangers and other potential hazards.
- (Click 3) To protect against these hazards, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration recommends **Look Before You Lock**. Check the car before locking it and walking away.
- (Click 4) Especially if you have a rear-facing car seat, it might be helpful to put a shoe or your phone next to the car seat to ensure that you will check it before you leave the car. Ask your daycare provider to call if your child does not arrive at daycare when expected, set an alarm or reminder on your phone, or purchase an alarm that beeps if you get too far away from the car while it is occupied. Keep parked cars locked to protect from entrapment.

Are We There Yet? (Slide 13)

- Especially on long trips, kids get bored in the car. They will ask to go to the bathroom. Are we there yet? I'm hungry! My tummy hurts. She hit me! He's looking at me!
- It is inevitable on a long trip that kids will get bored and unruly. Some cars are equipped with entertainment systems to allow kids to watch movies. Some kids will have tablets or phones to play on. But, those aren't necessary to keep kids entertained and happy(er) on the road.
- (Click 1) Healthy, safe snacks are a great way to keep a child content. Things like granola bars, raisins, Goldfish crackers, peanut butter crackers, applesauce pouches, or fruit.
- (Click 2) Be careful when giving snacks to kids under two. Anything with a stick (like a sucker or corndog) or that is hard or difficult to chew (like nuts or carrots) is a choking hazard (like whole grapes or hot dogs) should be avoided. If a small child started choking, you may not be able to get to them quickly in the car.
- (Click 3) You may want to avoid messy snacks with chocolate or anything sticky, ice cream, pudding, etc., for younger children. These may cause more stress than they are worth.
- A quick way to organize and control car snacks is by using a snack box or bag for each child. Pre-pack snacks for long trips by giving each child the amount they can have of each snack in a box or bag that is within their reach. It will save you from having to reach around to get things for them all day. Let them know that once the box is empty, their snacks are gone. (Click 4) It is also a good idea to pack water in either refillable bottles that can be filled during rest stops or in disposable plastic bottles. Packing extra water and snacks is helpful if you get stuck in traffic or stranded with car trouble.

Other Tips and Tricks (Slide 14)

Here are a few other tips and tricks for traveling with kids:

- (Click 1) Are you traveling with a child who is potty training? Bring their potty with you! Put it in the trunk or the back of the vehicle, and if they need to go...pull over! You will not have to put them back in diapers just for the trip, and it will help cut down on accidents while they try to hold it until the next stop.
- (Click 2) Do you have a child who gets car sick? Giving medication at least 30 minutes ahead of departure will help make sure it is working by the time you leave. There are other products available to help with nausea such as Sea-Band®. Pack bags or cups in case of a sick emergency. Also, remind yourself of your child's "tells" when they are going to be sick. Most children do something that lets you know they will be sick. If you are traveling with a niece or nephew or a grandchild who gets carsick, be sure to ask their parent what they do!
- (Click 3) Do some research ahead of your trip to find parks or picnic areas that allow you to stop and stretch your legs. Pack your meal and have a picnic! Let the kids play at the playground or run around in a safe area. They get the wiggles out, and you save some money on eating out. If this isn't a preference or option, look for a restaurant with a playground. Asking kids to sit still at a sit down restaurant when they have been in the car on a long trip may cause frustration for all involved.
- (Click 4) To give your kids something "new" to do in the car, pull out some toys or games they haven't played with in a while or swap some toys or games with a friend. It will be like getting new toys without spending a dime! A kids' songs CD or playlist can be helpful. It may be a little annoying to listen to kiddie music, but it is better than listening to fussy kids!

Legal Issues When Traveling with Kids (Slide 15)

If you are not used to traveling with children, there are some legal issues that you need to be aware of before taking them along.

- (Click 1) Arkansas law prohibits smoking in the car with children under 14. If you smoke, you can be pulled over for doing so with children in your car. If you must smoke along the trip, do so at rest stops.
- (Click 2) Primary seatbelt law requires that the driver and passenger be buckled regardless of age. Even adults must be buckled in the front seat.
- (Click 3) Legally, all children under age 6 and under 60 pounds must be restrained in a child safety seat that is appropriate for their age, weight, and height.
- (Click 4) Children under age 15 must be buckled in the car at all times regardless of where they are seated. So, even if they are in the back seat, if they are unbuckled, you could get a ticket.
- (Click 5) Drivers under the age of 18 are legally prohibited from transporting more than one non-related person under 21 in the car with them. This includes children they are babysitting as well as friends they may be driving. In other words, if the driver is transporting her/his siblings, cousins, etc., they are allowed; however, if they are babysitting someone else's children, they must be over 18 to drive more than one child at a time.

Links and References (Slide 16)

Car Seat and Other Car Safety Resources:

- <http://www.archildrens.org/live-healthy/community-outreach/child-passenger-safety/child-passenger-safety>
- <http://www.safercar.gov/parents/InandAroundtheCar/heatstroke.htm>
- <http://www.safercar.gov/parents/CarSeats/Car-Seat-Safety.htm>
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Other Extension Resources for Families:

- www.arfamilies.org
- www.uaex.edu/familylifefriday
- www.uaex.edu/childcare

Do you have other references to add?

Discussion and Questions

- What are some of your favorite car games to play?
- What are some snack ideas you could share with the group?