

**SAFE**  
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WORLDWIDE™

**Buckle Up:**  
**Every Ride, Every Time**

September 2013





# Is Your Child *Always* Buckled Up?

**Car crashes are a leading cause of death**

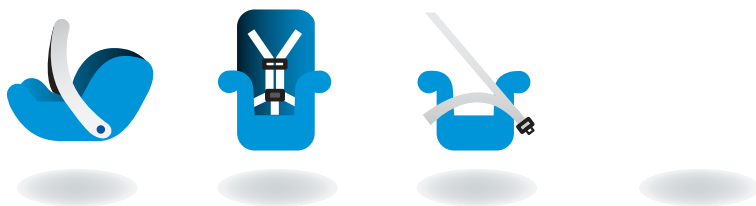
to children in the U.S.



Of those children who died in crashes in 2011, **33% were not buckled up.**<sup>3</sup>



**Who and Why?** We asked 1,000 parents what risks they were willing to take while driving with their kids. The results were surprising.



**1 in 4**

parents say they have driven with their children unrestrained.

**INCOME**

**1 in 3 affluent parents**, with a household income of \$100,000 or higher, say it is acceptable to leave their child unrestrained if they are not driving a far distance, compared to 15 percent of parents making less than \$35,000.

However, 60 percent of crashes involving children occur 10 minutes or less from home.<sup>18</sup>

**“Not driving far.”**



**AGE**

**23% of younger parents** (ages 18-29) said it would be acceptable to ride with a child unrestrained when traveling overnight compared to 13 percent of older parents (ages 30-49).

However, this is the time period when children are most likely to be injured in a crash.<sup>18</sup>

**“Traveling overnight.”**

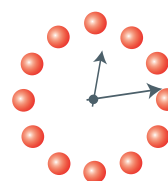


**EDUCATION**

**Parents with graduate degrees are twice** as likely to say it is acceptable to drive without buckling up their children, compared to parents with a high school education, particularly when they are in a rush (20 percent compared to 10 percent).

However, drivers in a rush may not be as careful as when they are fully attentive.

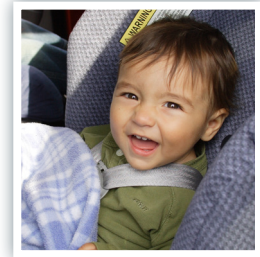
**“In a rush.”**



**BUCKLE UP: Every Ride, Every Time**

## Executive Summary

We've made tremendous progress in child passenger safety over the last 30 years. Thanks to the work of parents, law enforcement, government, child restraint and vehicle manufacturers, nonprofits, and communities, the number of children dying in car crashes has declined by 58 percent since 1987.<sup>1</sup>



Yet new findings from a study by Safe Kids Worldwide, made possible by a grant from the General Motors Foundation, indicate that there are parents who do not always take the time to ensure their children are safely secured in vehicles. In a survey of parents and caregivers, one in four respondents admitted to having driven without their child buckled up in a car seat or booster seat.

The survey asked parents and caregivers if it was acceptable in certain scenarios for a child to ride in a car without being fully buckled up. Potential exceptions included not driving far, being in a rush, traveling through the night, “rewarding” a child, and missing a booster or car seat.

Twenty-one percent of parents said it was acceptable to drive with their child not buckled up if they are not driving far. However, buckling up close to home is just as important as staying buckled up on long trips: 60 percent of crashes involving children occur 10 minutes or less from home.<sup>18</sup> Sixteen percent of parents also feel it is acceptable to allow children to ride not buckled up on overnight trips. However, this is the time period when children are most likely to be injured if they are in a crash.<sup>18</sup>

More affluent parents, parents with higher levels of education, men, and younger parents were more likely to say it was acceptable for a child to ride unrestrained in certain circumstances. For example, the percent of parents with a household income of \$100,000 or higher who said it was acceptable to ride with a child not buckled up if they aren't driving far was twice that of parents making less than \$35,000 (34 percent versus 15 percent).

Parents with graduate degrees were twice as likely to say that it is acceptable for a child to ride without a car seat or seat belt when they are in a rush, compared to parents with a high school education (20 percent compared to 10 percent). More than one in four parents ages 18 to 29 (27 percent) said it would be acceptable for a child to ride not buckled up for a short ride, compared to 19 percent of parents ages 30 to 49.

Unfortunately, these exceptions can lead to tragic results. In 2011, 679 children ages 12 and under died in motor vehicle crashes.<sup>3</sup> A third (221 children) were riding without a child safety seat or seat belt that could have saved their lives.

What's more, we know kids learn by watching. So when parents make exceptions it sends a powerful message to kids that it's not important to buckle up every ride, every time. As kids get older, they could be more likely to find exceptions for buckling up, which can continue to reverse the progress we've made.

We're already seeing evidence of this trend as teenagers have the lowest rate of seat belt use of all age groups and only 54 percent of high school students report always wearing a seat belt when riding with someone else.<sup>23 24</sup> In 2011, 2,638 teens ages 13 to 19 died in motor vehicle crashes.<sup>25</sup>

Based on these findings, Safe Kids offers these three strategies for parents to keep kids safe while riding in cars:

- 1. Buckle up kids on every ride, every time.**
- 2. Talk to other parents who are driving your kids about the importance of buckling up.**
- 3. Check that the right child safety seat is being used and that it's installed properly.**

We all know the importance of buckling up. But sometimes it's easy to forget how important it is, especially when there are so many other factors to consider. That's why Safe Kids, with the support of the General Motors Foundation, is working to remind parents to buckle up their kids every ride, every time.

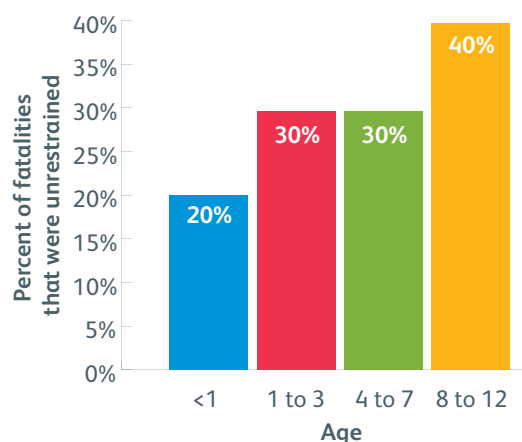
## The Issue: 679 Young Children Dying a Year

Thanks to the efforts of law enforcement, government, child restraint and vehicle manufacturers, nonprofits and, most importantly, parents, we've seen a dramatic improvement in protecting kids riding in cars. Since 1987, the number of children dying in motor vehicle crashes has fallen by 58 percent.<sup>1</sup> Securing kids in child safety seats is essential to keeping them safe in cars, and using them has become the norm. Seat belts are designed to keep older children and adults restrained in the case of a crash, but they are not designed to fit small, young children properly. Child safety seats are necessary for protecting children in cars.

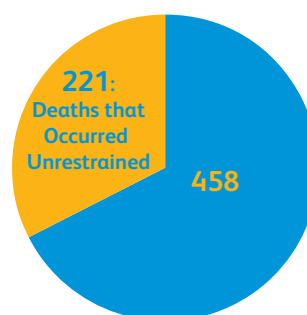
Unfortunately, motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1 to 12.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, 679 children ages 12 and under died in motor vehicle crashes.<sup>3</sup> That's one child every 13 hours. And while this is a vast improvement from 25 years ago, it's shocking that one-third of these deaths happened while the child was riding in the car completely unrestrained by a child safety seat or a seat belt (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

It's worth noting that older children in these fatal crashes are more often unrestrained, as compared to younger children (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> The proportion of children ages 8 to 12 who died unrestrained in a crash is double that of children less than 1 year old.

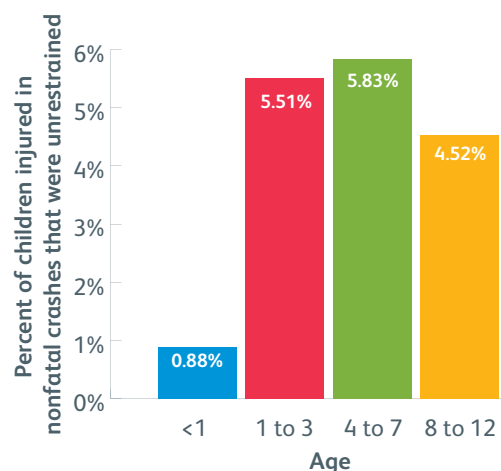
**Figure 2: Older children are more often unrestrained in fatal car crashes, compared to younger children.**<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1: In a third of car crash fatalities, the child was unrestrained.**<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 3: A greater proportion of injured children ages 1 to 7 are unrestrained in nonfatal crashes as compared to children under 1 year.**<sup>4</sup>



A similar pattern is seen among children who are nonfatally injured in car crashes. Among the 6,074 children ages 12 and under who were injured in car crashes, children ages 1 to 7 were more often unrestrained (Figure 3).<sup>4</sup>

The picture looks similar in the day-to-day use of child safety seats. In a large nationally-representative observational study, researchers found that 10% of children ages 4 to 7 years were not in a child safety seat or using a seat belt.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, only 2% of children less than 1 year old were observed unrestrained and 4% of children ages 1 to 3 were not buckled into a child safety seat.<sup>5</sup>

Given that nine out of ten parents buckle up their kids<sup>6</sup>, we considered the possibility that parents might choose not to put a child in a child safety seat in certain circumstances—what we call ‘situational nonuse’. We wondered if parents would find it acceptable to ride with a child unrestrained when traveling a short distance, when there wasn’t enough room, or as a “reward” for the child. We also sought to explore parent’s feelings about letting their children carpool with other adults, and whether child safety seats were discussed with others who drive with their children.

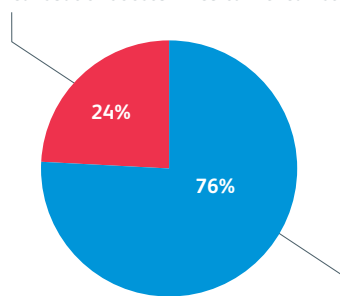
## What Parents Say

To answer these questions, Safe Kids surveyed more than 1,000 parents and caregivers who have children 10 and under. We asked questions about self-reported child safety seat and seat belt use, as well as questions about situations when they may feel that it’s acceptable to not buckle up a child.

One in four parents (24%) who took part in the survey said that there have been times when they’ve driven with their children unrestrained (Figure 4). Interestingly, there were differences by parents’ gender, age, education level, income, and race/ethnicity (Table 1).

**Figure 4: One in four parents say they have driven with their children unrestrained.**

I have once or twice/occasionally/often driven with my child(ren) not fully buckled in their car seat or booster in certain circumstances.



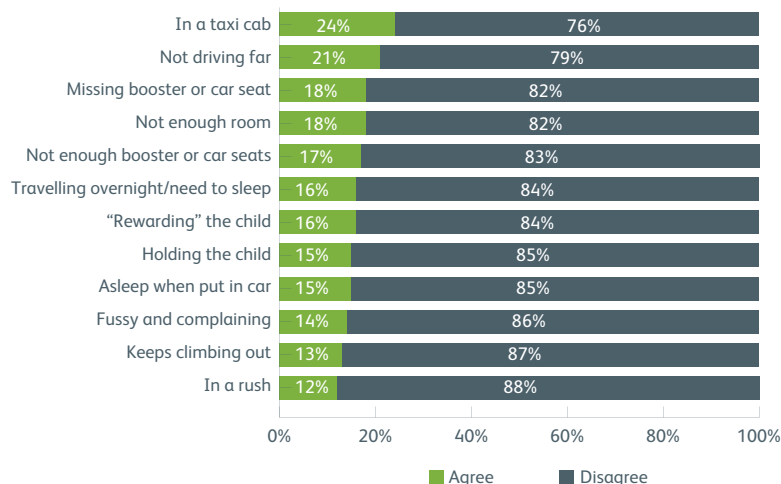
I have never driven anywhere with my child(ren) not fully buckled in their car seat or booster in any circumstance.

Parents were given a list of situations and asked if it was acceptable for a child to ride unrestrained (Figure 5). Men more frequently said that it was acceptable for a child to ride unrestrained than women (Figure 6). For example, men said that it was acceptable as a “reward” for the child twice as often as women.

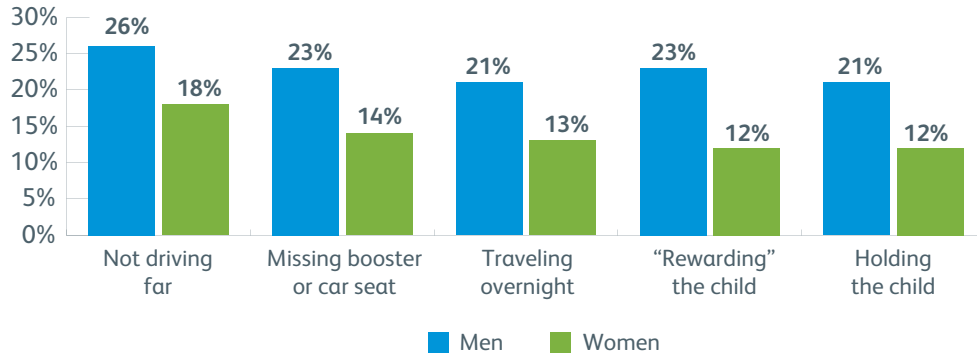
**Table 1: I have at least once (or occasionally, or often) driven with my child(ren) not fully buckled in their car seat or booster in certain circumstances.**

Gender		Education	
Women	23%	High School and Below	19%
Men	26%	High School to College	23%
Age		Graduate School	36%
18-29	28%	Ethnicity	
30-49	22%	White	22%
Income		African-American	27%
Under \$35k	21%	Other	30%
\$35k-\$49.9k	21%	Latino	26%
\$50k-\$74.9k	28%		
\$75k-\$100k	19%	Overall	
\$100k+	33%	23%	

**Figure 5: It is acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster seat when . . .**

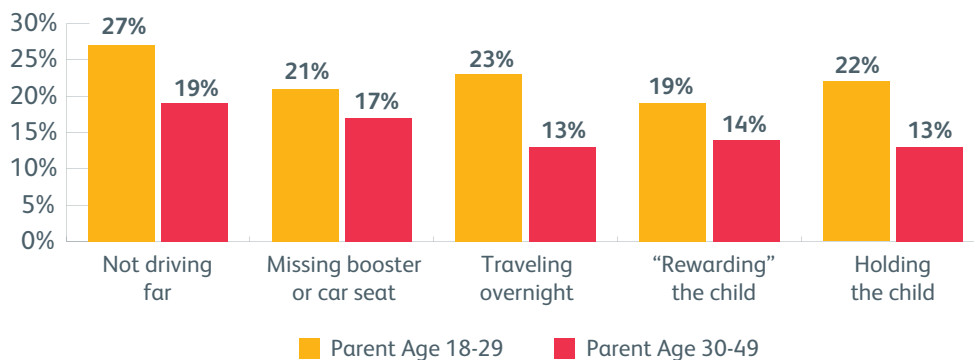


**Figure 6: When is it acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?**



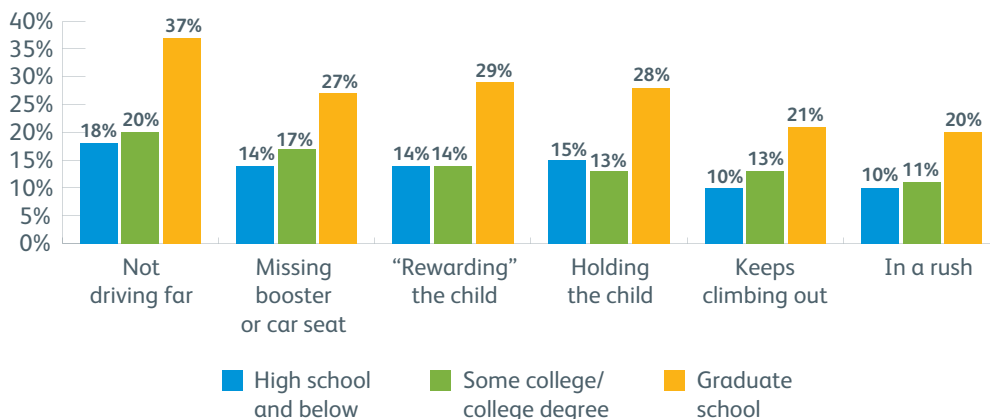
Younger parents were more likely to bend the rules (Figure 7). Twenty-three percent of parents ages 18 to 29 said it would be acceptable to ride with a child unrestrained when traveling overnight, compared to 13 percent of parents ages 30 to 49. However, previous research indicates that this is the time period when children are most likely to be injured if they are in a crash.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 7: When is it acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?**



Parents with the most education (those with a graduate degree) more often said that it was acceptable for a child to ride unrestrained (Figure 8). It's especially apparent in circumstances where time is important—the percent of parents with a graduate degree who said it was acceptable for a child to ride unrestrained when they are in a rush was twice that for parents with a high school or college education.

**Figure 8: When is it acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?**

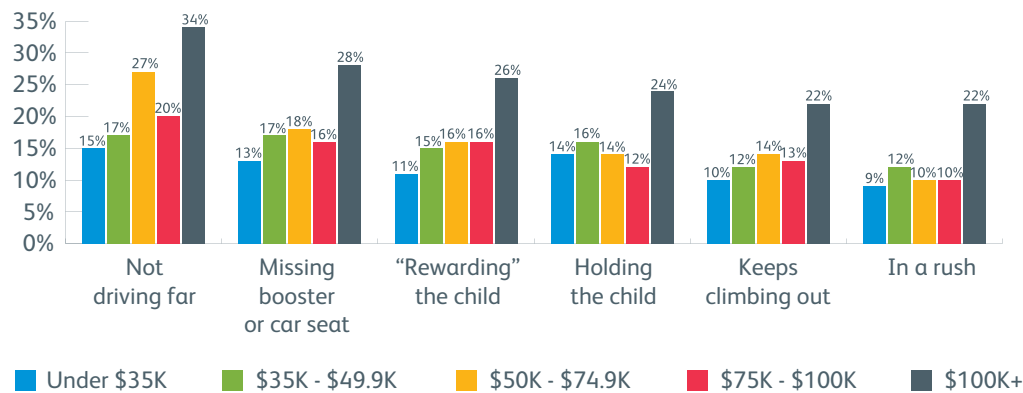






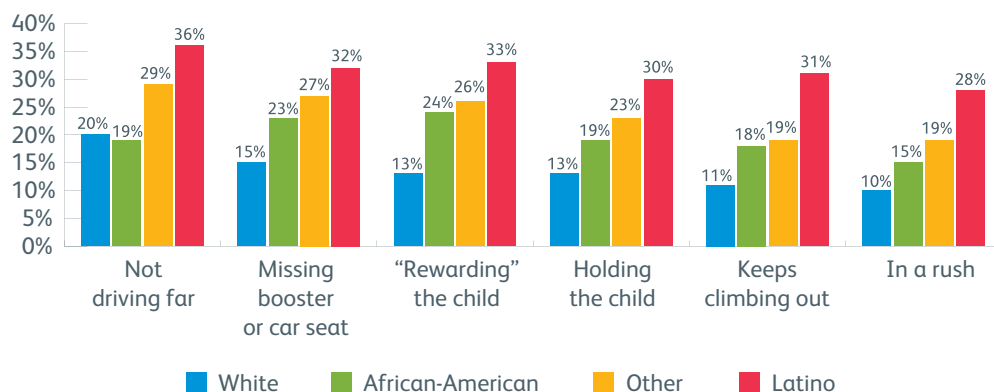
We found that as income level increased, parents more frequently said that it was alright for a child to ride unrestrained (Figure 9). Similar to the three education levels, we see that in situations where time is important, there is a considerable jump from middle-income and the highest income bracket (a self-report total household annual income above \$100,000). Several previous studies have focused on low-income parents. One study found that before an educational intervention, only 3 percent of kids from a low-income neighborhood who should be riding in a booster seat (ages 4 to 8 years) were using one.<sup>7</sup> While access to seats is critical, we speculate that higher-income parents may be more willing to make exceptions in child safety seat use, perhaps feeling that a crash won't happen to them or that their cars have extra safety features built into them.

**Figure 9: When is it acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?**



Latino parents more often reported that it was acceptable for a child to ride in a car unbuckled (Figure 10). This is likely a result of many cultural factors. Faith-based organizations can play an important role in encouraging parents to buckle up kids. Activities promoting child passenger safety delivered through these organizations have been successful in African-American communities.<sup>8</sup> Child safety messages should be tailored to be culturally sensitive and relevant.

**Figure 10: When is it acceptable for a child to ride in a car not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?**

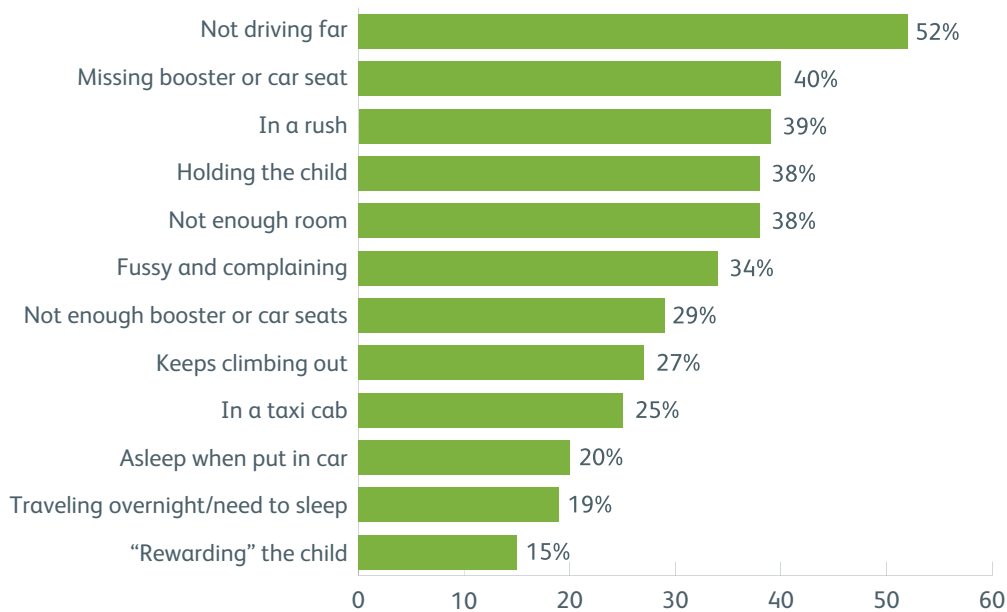




## What Parents Think Other Parents Do

We've seen that it's the norm for parents to buckle up their kids in cars, which may mean that parents won't admit it when they don't follow the rules. One way that we can better understand what parents are really doing is to ask them what other parents do. While one in four parents say that they've driven with their child not fully buckled up, 53 percent say they knew of situations when other parents allow their children to ride not fully buckled. Of the parents who knew of times when other parents let kids ride unrestrained, the most common circumstances were not driving far (52%), missing a booster or car seat (40%), and in a rush (39%) (Figure 11).

**Figure 11:** Under what circumstances do you think other parents allow children to ride not fully buckled in their car seat or booster?



## Carpooling

Carpooling is a way of life for many busy families. In our survey, half of parents (53%) said that their child rides in someone else's car without them for things like carpool or play dates. Of these parents, 70 percent always discuss the child safety seat situation with the person who's driving, similar to a previous survey that found that among parents who carpool, 79 percent say they would always ask another driver to use a booster seat for their child.<sup>9</sup> Of the three out of ten parents who don't discuss the child safety seat situation, half said that they don't because they trust or assume that drivers know to buckle their child in a child safety seat.

While parents are generally willing to use child safety seats, some parents have concerns about using them. One survey found that although 92% of parents and caregivers have heard of booster seats, 17% of them had concerns about their safety—for example, that booster seats were loose fitting and unstable and wouldn't restrain a child in a crash.<sup>10</sup> By skipping this important discussion, kids could be put at risk by other parents doing what they think is best.

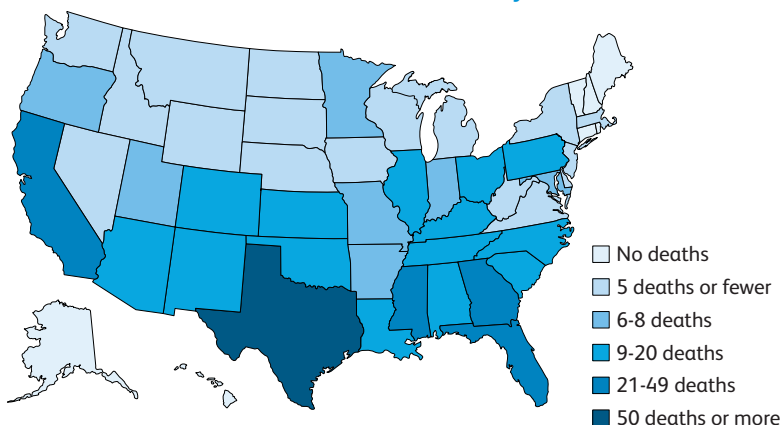
This report reveals that there are times when parents are more willing to ride with children not buckled up in cars. Knowing that it's the intent of laws to keep people safe, we ask if policymakers are doing everything they need to in order to protect kids in cars.



## Geographic Differences

Overall, Southern states saw greater numbers of children dying unrestrained in motor vehicle crashes in 2010 and 2011.<sup>22</sup> Florida had the second-highest number of deaths during the two year period, with 29 children ages 12 and under dying unrestrained in motor vehicle crashes. This is particularly important given that Florida is one of two remaining states without a booster seat law.

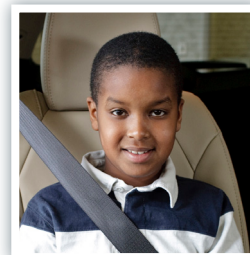
Unrestrained motor vehicle occupant fatalities in children 12 and under, 2010-2011, by state<sup>22</sup>



## Boosting Child Safety through Policy

Through the effective collaboration of public policy makers, parents, and organizations like Safe Kids, 48 states and the District of Columbia have enacted child booster seat laws. These laws have been extremely effective, but the research in this report indicates that there may be room for improvement. Safe Kids recommends the following public policy prescriptions:

- 1. Pass Laws in All 50 States.** Two states do not have strong laws to protect older kids in cars; Florida and South Dakota.<sup>12</sup> Safe Kids is committed to working with its coalitions and other child safety advocates to make the national child passenger safety law commitment unanimous. In 2012, Safe Kids worked with its coalitions in Florida in another attempt to pass a booster seat law, but the bill failed in committee.<sup>13</sup>
- 2. Upgrade Weaker Booster Seat Laws.** The American Academy of Pediatrics revised its recommendations on booster seat usage in 2011 to state that kids under 8 years or less than 4' 9" tall should be in a booster seat. Safe Kids supports this as the optimal.<sup>14</sup> Laws requiring booster seats for kids up to age 7 is the relative norm, but some states reach only to age 6. These should be amended to protect kids at least until age 7 and preferably to age 8.<sup>15</sup>
- 3. Renew Commitment to Enforcement.** Laws have at least two purposes: to regulate conduct and, especially in the safety space, to send a message about reasonable conduct. It is fair to say that enforcement of child passenger safety laws is a challenge for police. However, the results of this study suggest that public recognition of the need to keep kids in child safety seats may have diminished. Safe Kids urges states to make a renewed commitment to enforcing child passenger safety laws year round, and aggressively publicize those efforts. This may properly coincide with Child Passenger Safety Week in September of every year. A model for such efforts is the "Click It or Ticket" campaign for seat belt enforcement mounted around the Memorial Day holiday.<sup>16</sup> Congress should consider allocating federal dollars for grants to states to fund this needed enhancement in child safety enforcement.
- 4. Create Policies for Technology and Design.** There are ways that the evolution of technology and the design of motor vehicles can complement safety measures. Recently, NHTSA requested comments to increase safety in cars through the New Car Assessment Program (NCAP), and Safe Kids offered its input related to kids.<sup>17</sup> Among its recommendations were to refine the agency's "Ease of Use" rating for car and booster seats and to require rear seat safety belt reminders. The first recommendation is important because a user-friendly child restraint Ease of Use rating will help caregivers select a child restraint that will be easier to use and therefore would increase the likelihood of using child restraint systems every time.





### Ed's Story

On July 20, 2003, Ed Beaudette was traveling home from a family vacation in Canada with his 9-month-old daughter, Nora, and her mother, Heidi. The sun was shining bright and Nora seemed hot and uncomfortable, so Ed suggested that Heidi unbuckle their baby for just a minute to take off some extra layers of clothes. In the few minutes it took to do so, their vehicle was in a crash. Nora died upon arrival at the hospital. In memory of Nora, Ed and Heidi became nationally certified child passenger safety technicians. "I want to make sure the same tragedy that happened to me doesn't happen to anyone else," said Ed. "As a technician, each time I watched a family drive away after a child seat check, I knew I had done everything I could to make sure every kid I saw got a safe ride home."

## Strategies for Parents

**Buckle up kids on every ride, every time.** Every parent wants their children to ride safely in cars. Yet one-third of children who die in car crashes are completely unrestrained. It's easy to get busy and think that in a safe car there isn't a reason to buckle up every time. But the reality is that all it takes is one time to be riding in a car unprotected for a life to be changed forever. There is no reason important enough to take the risk.

**Talk to other parents who are driving your kids about the importance of buckling up.** Half of parents who report not talking about child safety seats with other adults driving their kids said that they trusted them and assumed that they would use them. Speak up about how you expect your children to ride in a car—the kind of seat to be used, where it goes in the car, and what to do if there isn't enough room in the car for a seat. Kids can't always speak for themselves. Make an agreement with other adults—other parents, grandparents, even a spouse—about using the right child safety seat or seat belt. Have a backup list of contacts that can pick up kids if there isn't room enough in a car for all kids to have their own seating position.

**Check that the right child safety seat is being used and that it's installed properly.**

Properly putting a child safety seat in a car can be a challenge. A recent study found that approximately 30 percent of caregivers who thought that they had put in their child safety seats correctly had actually installed it inaccurately and not securely.<sup>19</sup> Since the Safe Kids Buckle Up program began in 1997 with the partnership of General Motors and the General Motors Foundation, more than 1.6 million car seats have been checked for proper installation. Find a local car seat check-up event near you at [www.safekids.org/car-seat-events](http://www.safekids.org/car-seat-events).



Together, we've made a huge impact on keeping kids safe while riding in cars. Let's take the next step by buckling up every ride, every time.

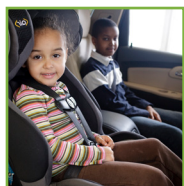
## Methodology

Safe Kids Worldwide commissioned a national online survey of 1,002 parents and caregivers of children ages 10 and under. The survey included 32 questions, relying on self-reported behavior. The survey was fielded from June 11-21, 2013. The margin of error for the total sample size included in this study (n=1002) is 3.1 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. If recruited, managed and selected correctly, online samples can effectively reflect a known universe. However, no online sample is projectable according to strict sampling theory that states that in order for a sample to be projectable to a population it must be a random sample of that population; that is, one in which all members of the population have a known and non-zero probability of selection.

## Parent Checklist: Top 5 Things to Do



1. **Right Seat.** This is an easy one. Check the label on your car seat to make sure it's appropriate for your child's age, weight and height. Like milk, your car seat has an expiration date. Double check the label on your car seat to make sure it is still safe.



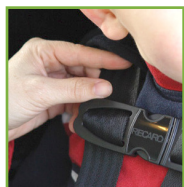
2. **Right Place.** Kids are VIPs, just ask them. We know all VIPs ride in the back seat, so keep all children in the back seat until they are 13.



3. **Right Direction.** You want to keep your child in a rear-facing car seat for as long as possible, usually until around age 2. When he or she outgrows the seat, move your child to a forward-facing car seat. Make sure to attach the top tether after you tighten and lock the seat belt or lower anchors.



4. **Inch Test.** Once your car seat is installed, give it a good shake at the base at the seat belt path. Can you move it more than an inch side to side or front to back? A properly installed seat will not move more than an inch.



5. **Pinch Test.** Make sure the harness is tightly buckled and coming from the correct slots—the car seat manual will tell you which ones. Now, with the chest clip placed at armpit level, pinch the strap at your child's shoulder. If you can't pinch any excess webbing, you're good to go.

Read the vehicle and car seat instruction manuals to help you with this checklist. If you have any trouble, or just want to double-check the fit, certified child passenger safety technicians are waiting to help. Visit [www.safekids.org/car-seat-events](http://www.safekids.org/car-seat-events) to find a car seat inspection event near you.

## Tips for Parents: Choosing the Right Seat<sup>21</sup>



**A REAR-FACING CAR SEAT** is the best seat for your young child to use. It has a harness and in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.



**A BOOSTER SEAT** positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child's body.



**A FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT** has a harness and tether that limits your child's forward movement during a crash.



**A SEAT BELT** should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain the child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck.

AGE



### Birth - 12 months



Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.



### 1 - 3 years



Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.



### 4 - 7 years



Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.



### 8 - 12 years



Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly, the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snug across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.



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11. For example, NHTSA is now examining car design in its National Car Assessment Program, and there is significant momentum towards improvements in the rear seat to maximize child safety.
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