

Buckled for Life
By
Patsy Heiss

REVISED 12/22/2016

NARRATOR

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death among children in the United States. Every year, hundreds of children ages 14 and under are killed in motor vehicle crashes, and thousands more are injured. The sad fact is many of these deaths and injuries could have been prevented.

By making sure your child is properly restrained in a car seat, booster seat or lap and shoulder seat belt, you will reduce significantly your child's chance of injury.

So what does "properly restrained" mean?

The reality is most child safety seats are installed or used incorrectly. St. Johns County Tax Collector Dennis W. Hollingsworth started Project Buckle Up in an effort to keep kids safe in the car. Staff at the St. Johns County Tax Collector's office are cross-trained as nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians who provide free inspection, education and installation assistance with your car seat.

Let's go over some common errors of car seat installation and passenger restraint.

"REAR-FACING SEATS IN FRONT SEAT WITH AIRBAG"

Never place a rear-facing infant restraint in the front seat if there is an airbag system. An airbag deploys at a

speed of up to two hundred miles per hour, faster than the blink of an eye. The result in even a minor crash with airbag deployment could prove fatal to your baby. Instead, properly secure your baby in the back seat, without mirrors, hard toys or snacks. Consult your car seat manual to determine the recommended placement for the handle and canopy.

"LOOSE-FITTING REAR FACING AND FORWARD FACING"

NARRATOR

Achieving a snug fit can be tricky. Project Buckle Up staff are trained to provide the answers, but also read your car seat and vehicle manuals, and consult your car seat's manufacturer website for online resources. It helps to press down firmly on the car seat while tightening the belt. Sometimes two people are needed for a secure fit. Rolled towels or pool noodles can also be used to help make the fit secure when installing rear-facing child safety seats.

To check for tightness, grasp the car seat at the belt path and move side to side. There should be no more than one inch of movement.

Do not grasp the back of the seat to check tightness - the seat is designed to have movement here.

"LOOSE RETAINER CLIP/ HARNESS IS TOO LOOSE"

NARRATOR

Quite often a child can get out of his or her harness because the retainer clip is not properly placed on the child, or the harness is too loose.

Try to pinch the harness webbing at different places. If you can, then the harness is too loose. Consult your car seat manual or have Project Buckle Up staff show you how to tighten and loosen the harness. Place one finger under the harness at the child's shoulder to ensure a snug but not uncomfortable fit.

It is important to note that the harness often is one continuous piece of webbing. Be sure to check for proper fit at the hips as well as the shoulders.

After you have tightened the harness, slide the retainer clip to armpit level.

Any higher could impede breathing. Any lower, and the child could wiggle free or be thrown from the seat in a crash.

"SMALL CHILDREN IN SEAT BELTS ONLY"

NARRATOR

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration recommend that children be placed in a booster seat until they are between 8 and 12 years old.

Booster seats are designed to keep the lap belt and shoulder harness properly placed on your child across the hardest points of their body - the chest and the hips.

If the belt slides onto the neck or up on the belly, or the harness is placed behind him, serious internal injuries can result.

A booster seat is recommended until your child fits a vehicle seat just like you. This means his back is flat against the seat, his feet are flat on the floor, his knees bend at the edge of the seat, and the seat belt lays flat on his shoulder, chest and hips.

"YOUNG CHILD RIDING IN THE FRONT SEAT"

NARRATOR

All children age 12 and under should ride in the back seat. It is the safest place for them, away from air bags, windshields and hard dashboards in the event of a crash. The majority of all motor vehicle injuries and fatalities happen in a car going 40 miles per hour or less. Think about it.

Just going 30 to 35 miles per hour, and running into a tree has the equivalent of force as jumping from the top floor

of St. Johns County's courthouse. Would you let your child do that?

NARRATOR

Hundreds of children killed and thousands of children injured every year. Project Buckle Up is determined to reduce those numbers, and make sure no St. Johns County parent ever has to face the death or injury of a child due to improper vehicle safety restraint.