

## Set kids up for success before car trips.

### Plan to motivate (and distract) safely in the car.

- Collect items that can entertain and distract your child from unbuckling that they can safely use on their own, without your ongoing supervision. Keep these handy, either in or near the car!
- Brainstorm small rewards you can offer after a safe drive (preferred activity, snack, etc.).

### Make visuals, videos, or social stories to set the stage.

- Simple “First-Then” visuals in the car help kids remember the incentive for staying safe.
- You can also use multiple-step visuals, videos (of your child, or even videos from Youtube), or “social stories” that show each part of your drive, remind kids of their expected behaviors, and highlight that you can get lots of attention/praise and even a reward for staying buckled and safe.

### Practice makes progress!

- Use your visuals, videos, and/or stories during pretend play at home (e.g., buckling in stuffed animals). This helps give you practice with praising good behavior too!
- Use your visuals, videos, and/or social stories to do brief practice drives when you are not in a rush. **By keeping practice short (even just a few minutes at first!), you maximize opportunities to praise and reward your child for staying safe!**



## During drives, “press the gas” on positives.

### Praise early and often.

- When your child is showing you good/safe behaviors, provide enthusiastic praise and attention right away! No good behavior is too small, especially at first. We want kids to know that sitting appropriately, cooperating, staying calm and safe, and other important behaviors are important, and praise/attention is the best way to do that.
- The reverse is also true—do your best to reduce your attention and reactions when children are misbehaving, especially if it is not dangerous (whining, screaming). When safety is a concern, you can intervene as needed but not add extra talking or attention to the interaction.

### Pay attention to what your child seems to want during drives; next time, provide it before they start to misbehave.

- If your child seems to want your attention, make a point to proactively talk and interact with them right from the beginning of the drive. When possible, have a second adult sit in the back to provide a steady stream of attention. On longer drives, try taking brief breaks on the side of the road to provide attention for staying buckled.
- If your child seems to want to escape their seat/out of the car, plan breaks to get out of the car proactively (before they are misbehaving) and do not allow them to get out of the car right away if they unbuckled their seat belt.
- If you find yourself offering your phone, food, or toys to help get them back in their seat, provide this at the start of the trip, or only after your child sits appropriately for a reasonable amount of time (e.g., start with a few blocks or a few minutes, and slowly increase this over time).

**Work with your medical, behavioral health, and school teams to help tailor these ideas for your unique child.**

## Contact Us

For questions or more information, contact the Center for Childhood Safety at (816) 234-1607, or [centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu](mailto:centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu)

[childrensmercy.org](http://childrensmercy.org)

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26-CCS-2399 03/26



## Car Safety for Children with Developmental and Behavioral Differences



## My child gets out of the car seat or booster seat or seat belt. What should I do when this happens?

### BEFORE THIS HAPPENS:

- Prepare for your car trip.
  - » Create a checklist to ensure you have everything your child requires or wants.
  - » Praise safe car riding behaviors.
  - » Bring things to distract your child from unbuckling:
    - DVD players
    - Headphones
    - Chew toys
    - Games
    - Coloring books and crayons
    - Snacks
  - » Bring items your child uses for calming – favorite blanket, favorite book, etc.
- Consider your child's sensory needs: tight-fitting clothes, compression vest, weighted vest or weighted blanket.

**Safety tip:** Children are safest in the back seat until 13 years old.

**Safety tip:** Make sure the child safety locks are on for the windows and doors in the back seat.

### WHEN THIS HAPPENS:

- Pull your car off the road at a safe spot as quickly as you can. Place your child back in their seat and strap them in with the harness or seat belt. If possible, someone should sit in the back seat with the child.
- Ensure the harness fit is correct in their front-facing car seat.
  - » Harnesses should be at or above the child's shoulders (the harness slot nearest to or above the shoulders).
  - » Chest clip should be placed at armpit level.
  - » Harness should fit snug enough that you cannot pinch a fold in the harness – there should be no slack.

- Refer to your car seat instruction manual for proper use.
- If your child is using a seat belt (with or without a booster seat), make sure the seat belt is properly positioned:
  - » Shoulder belt should fit snug across the shoulder and chest.
  - » Lap belt should fit snug across the upper thighs, not over the stomach.
  - » Many seat belts can be locked:
    - Slowly pull the shoulder portion out of the retractor.
    - When you have pulled all the seat belt out of the retractor, you will hear a clicking sound once the seatbelt goes back into the retractor.
    - When you pull on the webbing, it will not pull out again and the seat belt is locked.
    - If using a booster seat, please read your owner's manual to see if you can lock a seat belt with your booster seat.

**Safety tip:** Make sure the harness, vest or seat belt is snug and laying flat against your child's body.

**Safety tip:** Make sure the harness is touching your child's clothes and not the skin.

**Safety tip:** Tight-fitting underclothes or a compression vest may help prevent irritation from harness fit.

**Safety tip:** Not all seat belts are able to be locked. If the above instructions don't work, consult your vehicle's owner's manual or a CPST.



### AFTER THIS HAPPENS:

- If your child continues to get out of their seat belt or booster seat, they may need a car seat with a harness and a higher weight limit. A harness will provide a more secure fit in the car and is harder to escape. You can find a list of car seats with higher harness weights at [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org).
- There are vests and special needs car seats that may work better for your child. Some of these may need to be recommended by a health care professional. You can contact a CPST with experience in Children with Special Health Care needs by calling the Center for Childhood Safety at (816) 234-1607, or emailing [centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu](mailto:centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu).

**Safety tip:** There are car seats with different types of chest clips and buckles that are harder to push.

## I've tried different car seats and my child still gets out of their car seat.

### What do I do now?

- There are escape-proof products available for use with some special needs car seats. (Roosevelt car seat has chest clip guard and a buckle guard.) These products have been crash tested with a specific large medical car seat. You can see the escape-proof products and the large medical seat they're made for at [merrittcarseat.com](http://merrittcarseat.com).
- Using an E-Z-On vest with floor mount tether may prevent your child from unbuckling. There are specific vehicle considerations for use of this system. You also will need to have special hardware placed in your vehicle. You can contact [ezonpro.com](http://ezonpro.com) to see if this system will work in your vehicle.
- You can find out more information about special needs car seats by calling the Center for Childhood Safety at (816) 234-1607, or emailing [centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu](mailto:centerforchildhoodsafety@cmh.edu).

**Safety tip:** Some of the special needs vests are similar to those worn on the school bus which may make the vest familiar to your child.

**Safety tip:** While the manufacturer of the Chest Clip Guard and the Buckle Guard recommend use with conventional car seats with certain buckles and harness systems, check with your car seat manufacturer before you add these or any products to your car seat.



# MAKE A SAFE TRAVEL PLAN FOR YOUR FAMILY

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Picture of my child buckled in the car seat.

### Contact Us

For questions or more information,  
contact Center for Childhood  
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# TYPES OF VESTS AVAILABLE



**EZ-ON MAXPV**  
ezonpro.com  
for 31-168 lbs  
(XS-XL)



**Adjustable zipper vest with loops**  
for 31-168 lbs  
(XS-XL)  
ezonpro.com



**RideSafer travel vest**  
At least 2 years old  
for 26.5-40 lbs, X-Small  
for 30-60 lbs, Small  
for 50-80 lbs, Large  
for 80-110 lbs, X-Large  
saferide4kids.com

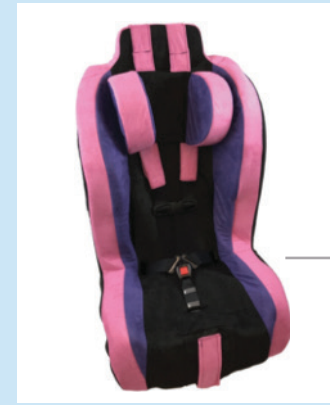


**Besi Moore support vest**  
for 65 lbs and up  
(Med and Large)  
besi-inc.com/  
securements.html



**Merritt Churchill positioning harness with escape-proof products**  
for 65-175 lbs; 48"-72"  
merrittcarseat.com

# LARGE MEDICAL SEATS



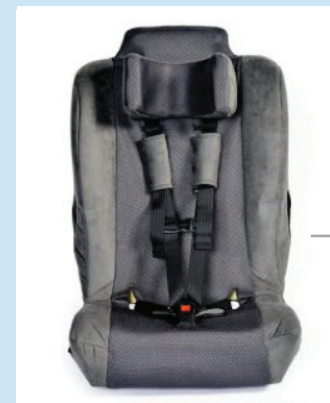
**Merritt Roosevelt car seat with escape-proof products**  
for 35-115 lbs; 33.5"-62"  
merrittcarseat.com



**Merritt chest clip guard**



**Merritt buckle guard**



**Spirit car seat**  
for 25-130 lbs;  
up to 66"  
inspiredbydrive.com



**Retainer clip guard for Spirit car seat**



**Buckle guard for Spirit car seat**