

Booster Seats: A Simple Solution That Saves Lives

In August 1998, Krista Baker and her three sons were involved in a crash that totaled their car. Only months earlier, Krista received some life-saving advice: technicians at a child safety seat checkup told her that Zachary, her four-year-old son, should be riding in a booster seat and using it along with an adult lap and shoulder belt. This simple tip may have saved Zachary's life as he escaped the crash virtually unharmed.

Unfortunately, Autumn Alexander Skeen did not know the importance of booster seats until it was too late. In 1996, while visiting family in Yakima, Washington, Skeen and her son Anton were both buckled into a sport utility vehicle using a standard lap and shoulder seat belt. Autumn Skeen was distracted and lost control of the vehicle. The crash caused Anton's small, four-year-old body to slip from the seat belt and he was thrown from the vehicle as it rolled over. Anton was killed instantly.

Skeen thought she was doing the right thing by simply buckling Anton in. What she now knows, but what most other parents don't realize, is that once children outgrow their convertible child safety seats, they need to be put in booster seats until the seat belt system designed for adults fits them correctly.

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for children of every age from 6 to 14 years – due

in part to the fact that most kids are unbuckled or improperly restrained in vehicles. From birth to age one, restraint use is 97 percent, for ages one to four it is 91 percent. From age 5 to 15, restraint use falls to 68.7 percent, and over 47 percent of fatally injured children ages four to seven are completely unrestrained. One NHTSA study showed that only 6.1 percent of booster-aged children were restrained in a booster seat.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends that all children ages 12 and under ride in the back, properly restrained at all times.

Child safety seats, including boosters, are very effective in keeping kids safe. Parents should use boosters for children once they outgrow forward-facing child safety seats at about 40 lbs. and around four years old. They should continue to use booster seats until children are 4'9" tall and about 80 lbs.

Parents should have child safety seats inspected by one of a number of certified and trained technicians in their community to make sure they are installing them correctly.

For more information on booster seats or to locate a child safety seat technician near you, simply click on www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/ or call **1-800-424-9393**.