



## ***Carpools and the Buckle Rule: One Child; One Belt***



Most parents join a carpool because it provides an opportunity to be with their children, get to know their children's friends, save time, and save gas. But is saving time and gas worth risking a child's life when there are not enough seat belts for each rider? The rule must be **One Child, One Belt**.

It is important to select parents who are reliable when organizing a successful carpool. Passenger safety is the first step to successful carpooling but consider some other issues such as discipline, being on time, snack policy in the vehicle, food allergies, and emergency phone numbers. Always make sure to have telephone numbers of the other and the names of back-up family or friends who can be called in an emergency.

Children are particularly at risk from death and injury as occupants in motor vehicles. Motor vehicle safety features are designed for the comfort and protection of an adult-sized body. These same devices may place children at greater risk. Child safety seats and seat belts, when correctly used and correctly installed, can prevent injury and save lives.

### **Importance of Booster Seats**

**Shoulder Belt:** Must cross midway between child's shoulder and neck.

**Lap Belt:** Place over upper thighs and not on stomach.



What if the carpool children are too small to correctly fit in the seat belt? If that is the case, booster seats are needed. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 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. Most children do not fit properly in the vehicle lap/shoulder belt until they are at least 4'9" tall, this usually is between the age of 8 and 12 years old.



Never allow children to put the seat belt shoulder strap behind their back or under the arm. No matter how long or short the trip, make sure children are in an age and weight appropriate child safety seat, booster seat, or properly secured seat belt.

**REMEMBER! THE BACK IS WHERE IT'S AT! CHILDREN UNDER THIRTEEN SHOULD RIDE IN THE BACK SEAT BECAUSE IT'S SAFER THERE.**

### **Tips for Safe Carpooling**

#### **Before The Ride**

- ✓ Open the car door, walk completely around my car, looking for kids, toys and pets.
- ✓ Make sure each child can be seen as they approach the car.
- ✓ Children not riding in the car should be fully supervised and physically held by an adult, so the driver does not back over them by mistake.
- ✓ Teach children not to play around or near cars in driveways, parking lots or the street.

### **During The Ride**

- ✓ Each child will ride in a car seat, booster seat or seat belt, based on individual age, weight and height.
- ✓ Each child has his own seat belt system to hold him, the booster seat or car seat.
- ✓ Each child under 13 is riding in a back seat.
- ✓ Airbags have been disabled for infants and children who must ride in the front seat (front seat location is NOT recommended.)
- ✓ Drive only as many occupants as there are seat belts.
- ✓ Use car seats or booster seats correctly for the children being transported.
- ✓ Do not start the car until every person is properly buckled.

### **After The Ride**

- ✓ Keep the car and trunk locked so children cannot play in or around the car when an adult is not there.
- ✓ Make sure that all children exit the car on the curb side.
- ✓ Once children exit my car, wait until they are safely supervised before driving off.
- ✓ NEVER leave children alone in the car, even for a minute!

*Source: National Safe Kids, Carpool Driver Safety Checklist, 2011*

The carpool may provide an opportunity for parents and children to spend time together. Consider having activities planned to keep the older children in the vehicle occupied during the trip. The following are suggestions that will help with the “boredom” factor; keeping a list on a refrigerator or bulletin board for creative ideas will expand the project library and allow for rotation of activities.

### **Activity Ideas for Children Safely Restrained in a Vehicle**

- Take along a “curiosity bag”. Use a mesh laundry bag and collect a variety of interesting, child safe soft toys. Let the child “explore” the bag any way they want. When they have completed their first review of the contents, ask the child what each item is, ask what it is for or what can be done with it. Talk about things that are the same color or same category. Renew contents of the curiosity bag frequently!
- Tell stories.
- Sing songs. Purchase children’s CDs, ask parents to contribute CDs, or share some “golden oldies” (i.e. “Puff the Magic Dragon”).

The most important “activity” for carpools is the adult attitude. Carpooling takes a lot of time. Planning ahead and having reasonable expectations will make the excursions less stressful for all vehicle occupants.

*Source: Activity Ideas for Older Children Safely Restrained in a Vehicle, Bryan ISD, Parent Education Partnership Program, Mary E. Walraven, SWA, ICCE, Coordinator.*