



Car Pools and the Buckle Rule: One Child; One Belt



According to a recent study conducted by Nissan Motor Corporation, the average car pool parent is 40 years of age and shuttles three children. Over half of the “deliveries” are to school with the balance being for sports, music lessons and scouting in that order. Nothing new here, but a lot of time is spent waiting in the car. On average, seven hours a week with a driving distance of 15 miles per week.

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

Passenger safety is the first step to successful car pooling but consider some other issues such as discipline, being on time, snack policy in the vehicle, food allergies, and emergency phone numbers. Never start your car without telephone numbers of the other parents at home and work, 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 safety belts, when correctly used and correctly installed, can prevent injury and save lives.



But, what if the car pool “munchkins” are too small to correctly fit in the safety belt? If that is the case, booster seats are recommended. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *small children*, from about age 4 and 40 pounds to at least age 8 unless 4’9”, should use a booster seat for maximum protection. The booster seat should position the lap/shoulder belt correctly—with the lap belt across the child’s hips and the shoulder belt across the child’s shoulders and chest. The shoulder belt should not cross the face or the front of the neck.

✓ **Tip:** Even some children up to age 12 may be small in stature and the safest position for them will be in a booster seat. Consider this: a booster seat is a necessary intermediate step between a child safety seat and a safety belt.

Big kids, 8 years and older or 80 plus pounds, should fit the adult lap/shoulder belt system provided in the car. Another guideline is that when a child is tall enough, their knees will bend at the edge of the seat and the restraint system will fit them correctly. Make sure the seat belts fit snugly. Never allow children to put the safety belt shoulder strap behind their back or under the arm.






No matter how long or short the trip, make sure children are in age and weight child safety seat or appropriate booster seat, or properly secured seat belts. All children 12 and younger should ride in the back seat. Remember, ***the back is where it’s at!***

In some circumstances, a car pool may have toddlers as passengers. If that is the case, the rule is: **one child safety seat** for each toddler. All the child safety seats must be properly installed in the back seat of the vehicle. Never put any child, 12 and under, in the front seat!

The car pool may provide an opportunity for parents and children to spend time together. To help with various time factors, consider having activities for older children available in your car. 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 acappella (without a musical instrument) or with a tape. Purchase children’s tapes at local music store, ask parents to contribute tapes, or share some “golden oldies” (“Jeremiah Was A Bull Frog”, Puff the Magic Dragon”, Beach Boy tunes with sound effects).

*Source: Activity Ideas for Older Children Safely Restrained in a Vehicle, Bryan ISD, Parent Education Partnership Program, Mary E. Walraven, SWA, ICCE, Coordinator.
Check out your local library for game ideas!*

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

Tip: The driver needs to have some things to do in the vehicle while waiting for music lessons or soccer practice to end. Bring along reading material, craft-type work, cross-word puzzles, write letters, plan a week’s worth of menus, listen to favorite music, or close your eyes and relax!