



Booster Seats (ER)

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“(The adult seat belt) stopped him from going through the windshield, thank goodness. But still, it’s not enough.”

– Jeannie Jones, Grandmother

“Do you remember the car crash?” Dr. Carden Johnston asks 7-year-old Brad in the emergency room at Alabama Children’s Hospital in Birmingham.

“No sir,” Brad replies.

“Do you remember riding in the helicopter?”

“Yes, sir.”

Brad was in the front seat of his mother’s Jeep when they hit another car head-on. He was wearing an adult seat belt. “It stopped him from going through the windshield, thank goodness,” says Brad’s grandmother, Jeannie Jones. “But still, it’s not enough.”

Brad should have been in a booster seat. So should his 6-year-old cousin Zachary, who was riding in the back of the jeep without a seatbelt. “We crashed in the car,” Zachary tells Dr. Johnston. “I fell in the front seat.”

“From the back seat you fell into the front seat?” Dr. Johnston asks.

“Yeah.”

After an examination, doctors determine that Brad has an internal injury. “The bowel wall appears to be bruised,” says pediatric radiologist Dr. Timothy Frye. The seat belt over Brad’s waist bruised his stomach. The shoulder strap cut into his neck. Doctors say kids like Brad and Zachary, who are under 80 pounds and shorter than four-feet nine inches, should ride in a booster seat. What’s more, experts say, the best booster seats—the safest ones—have high backs.

“These are better,” Dr. Johnston says, “because of the little notch for the shoulder harness.”

The accident has been a terrible ordeal for Brad and his family, but also, a valuable lesson. “They’re going to get booster seats,” Jeannie Jones says, “and use them.”

Tips for Parents

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of childhood death in the United States. In 2006, more than 1,300 children under 14 years of age were killed in motor vehicle accidents. Another 184,000 were injured, according to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. Among children under 5, an estimated 425 lives were saved because they were properly fitted in a car or booster seat.

In 2007, 80 percent of children up to 7 years of age were using a car or booster seat. That’s up from 51 percent in 1999. But despite the rise in use, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety finds that out of 41 booster seats tested, 13 did not meet their qualifications for recommendation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends children 10 years old and younger should be using a booster seat. In general, a booster seat raises a child up for a better fit in an adult belt system. The National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) says the following children should use a booster seat:

- A child who has outgrown a convertible child safety seat (about 40 lbs or 40 inches)
- A child who weighs between about 40 and 80 lbs.
- Usually a child who is about 4 to 8 years old and is under 4'9" tall
- A child who cannot sit with his or her back straight against the vehicle seat back cushion or who cannot sit with knees bent over a vehicle's seat edge without slouching.

There are a variety of booster seats on the market. Parents need to choose the right seat for their child and car. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says to consider these variables when deciding which seat to use:

- Kids vary in size even when they are the same age.
- Booster seats vary in size and shape.
- Vehicle seats vary from bench-type to contoured.
- Safety belt systems also vary from car model to model.

Parents need to be sure to read the booster seat instructions and vehicle owner's manual before installing a booster seat.

The NHTSA also asks parents to remember these safety tips:

- All children ages 12 and under should sit in the back seat, properly restrained whenever possible.
- Never use just a lap belt across a child sitting in a belt-positioning booster.
- Never put the shoulder belt under a child's arm or behind the back because it eliminates the protection for the upper part of the body and increases the risk of severe injury in a crash.
- Never use pillows, books, or towels to boost a child. They can slide around and increase the likelihood of injury.

References

- Centers for Disease Control
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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