

SEND Educational Needs and Disabilities Service (SEND) Children's Occupational Therapy (OT) Information Sheet – Travelling Safely in a Vehicle

Every year children and young people are injured in collisions on British roads travelling as passengers in vehicles, where they have been placed into incorrectly fitted seat belt/car seats/travel safety devices.

No matter how well designed these items are if they are not fitted and used correctly, they will not provide the recommended levels of safety and support.

Ensuring the safety of children while traveling in vehicles is paramount, and UK laws surrounding children's car seats and travel are designed to protect them.



Car Seat Regulations Overview in the UK



UK law requires that:

- All children must normally use a car seat until they're 12 years old or 135cm tall - whichever comes first.
- Children over the age of 12 years or more than 135cm tall must wear a seat belt.
- You can choose a child car seat based on your child's height or weight.

The same rules apply to a child or young person with disabilities/medical conditions, unless an exemption certificate has been issued by a doctor indicating that they are unable to use the required travel safety device because of their condition.

Additional travel safety devices specific to an identified need can also be used alongside the existing seat belt or car seat.

The law differs slightly depending on the child or young person's age, the seat position in the vehicle, and the type of vehicle – see additional information and guidance below which will assist you in making an informed parental and carer decision about car seat and travel safety items you choose to access/purchase.

IMPORTANT:

- Since April 2008, it has been illegal to use child car seats manufactured before 1995 and approved under older regulations (ECE R44/01 and 44/02).
If you are unsure about the legality or safety of your car seat, check for the “E” label, which should show either the R44/04 or R129 standard, along with the height or weight range suitable for the seat.
- Parents are encouraged to choose R129 seats for their enhanced safety features.
BUT R44/04 seats are still legally permitted if they are used according to their instructions.
- It is the driver’s responsibility to ensure the seat belt/car seat/harness/travel safety device is in good condition, fitted and used correctly (in line with manufacturer recommendations and guidance).
- There is a standard fixed penalty if a child under 14 years is not on the correct seat or wearing a seat belt/harness/safety device while you are driving.
- It is recommended that these items are NOT recycled and re-used.
Health and Safety regulations discourage the recycling of car seats as there are multiple concerns regarding the continued integrity and safety of car seats especially but would be applicable to all travel safety devices as it is often not possible to verify accurate product history.

How can SEND Children’s Occupational Therapy help?

The SEND Children’s Occupational Therapy team are unable to assess the compatibility of and fitting of seat belts, car seats, harnesses, travel safety devices within your vehicle; Or provide car seats.

We can work with families to ensure they have appropriate guidance to make an informed parental and carer decision regarding their child or young person’s needs and travelling safely.

We can also support on behalf of parents and carers, with applications to access alternative funding for travel safety items - for example charity funding, DLA, Motability scheme.

See additional information and guidance below which will assist you in making an informed parental and carer decision about car seat and travel safety items you choose to access/purchase.

If you have any questions or feel a further conversation would be helpful, please contact SEND Children’s Occupational Therapy via Families First Children’s Services on 01752 668000; Or email the OT Duty Desk – OTDutyDesk@plymouth.gov.uk

Additional Information and Guidance

Current Safety Requirements – Vehicular Travel

Age of Child/Young Person	Front Seat	Rear Seat	Other
<p>Children Up to 3 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is illegal to place a child in a rear-facing car seat in the front if the passenger-side airbag is active. - The airbag must be deactivated if you need to use a rear-facing seat in the front. - Alternatively, place the child in the rear of the vehicle using the correct restraint. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child must always use a proper child restraint. - Exceptions are rare and typically apply only to taxis or hire vehicles. 	<p>Taxis/Private Hire Cars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If no child restraint is available in a licensed taxi or hire car, a child under 3 years may travel unrestrained in the rear seat. - However, this exception exists for practical reasons, and safety experts strongly recommend using a child seat if possible.
<p>Children Aged 3-12 years OR Under 135cm in Height</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child must use a suitable car seat or booster seat that fits their size. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child must use a proper child restraint or, if unavailable, an adult seat belt in certain circumstances, such as: - When traveling in a licensed taxi or private hire vehicle. - During unexpected short trips where a child seat is unavailable. - If there are two occupied child restraints in the back, making it impossible to fit a third. 	<p>No Seat Belts Available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If no seat belts are fitted (in older vehicles), children over 3 years may travel unrestrained in the rear. - However, this scenario is rare, and modern vehicles are almost always equipped with seat belts.
<p>Children Aged 12 years and above OR Over 135cm in Height</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult seat belt must be worn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult seat belt must be worn, regardless of age, once the child reaches 135 cm in height or turns 12 years. 	

Specific Rules for Other Vehicles

Vehicle	Front Seat	Rear Seat
Vans, Coaches, Minibuses, Goods Vehicles	- Children must use the correct child restraint or seat belt, as appropriate for their age and size.	
Small Minibuses with an unladen weight under 2540 kg		- Children under 3 years must use a child seat if available. - Children aged 3 to 11 years and under 135 cm must use a child seat or, if unavailable, an adult seat belt. - Children over 12 years or over 135 cm must use the seat belt provided.
Larger Minibuses with unladen weight over 2540kg		- Passengers over the age of 14 years must wear seat belts, and it is strongly advised that all passengers, regardless of age, wear seat belts.
Coaches		- Passengers over 14 years must wear seat belts in the rear. - Again, wearing seat belts is strongly recommended for all passengers for maximum safety.

RI29 (i-Size) Regulations: The Newer Standard

The **RI29** (also known as **i-Size**) regulation is the latest standard for child car seats and provides enhanced safety features compared to the older ECE R44 standard. Here are the key features of the RI29 regulation:

- **Height-Based Seats:** Unlike the older regulations, which were based on a child's weight, RI29 seats are height-based, making it easier for parents to choose the right seat.
- **Rear-Facing for Longer:** Under RI29, children must remain in rear-facing seats until they are at least 15 months old, which is longer than under ECE R44, where children could forward-face after 9 kg (about 9 months old).
- **Side-Impact Testing:** RI29 seats must undergo more rigorous testing, including side-impact protection, which was not mandatory under R44.
- **Isofix:** i-Size seats are designed to work with the Isofix system, reducing the chances of incorrect fitting and offering improved protection.

Funding Travel Safety Items

As a parent/carer of a child or young person, please ensure that you are accessing up to date information regarding travelling safely.

The links below are not exhaustive but are key in terms of current legal requirements and recommendations to assist you in making an informed parental and carer decision:

- [Disability Living Allowance \(DLA\)](#)
If you are looking after a child with a health condition or disability who is under the age of 16 years, they may be entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA).
This can help towards the extra costs of bringing up a disabled child.
- [Motability](#)
The mobility component of DLA can be used to support accessing a vehicle via the Motability Scheme for children and young people aged over 3 years.
This can include adaptations to make the vehicle safe for them and others traveling with them - you should request that a specialist car seat for your child is included.
- [Personal independent Payment \(PIP\)](#)
- [Family Fund](#)
- [Caudwell Children](#)
- [Elifair](#)
- [Independence at Home - Towards Independent Living](#)
- [AFK | Home](#)
- [Newlife the Charity - Changing the lives of disabled children](#)
- [Turn2Us - Grant search](#)
- [Disability Grants](#)

Additional Information Links

- [Child car seats: the law: Using a child car seat or booster seat - GOV.UK](#)
- [When a child can travel without a car seat](#)
- [Seat belts: the law: Overview - GOV.UK](#)
- [Parental rights and responsibilities: What is parental responsibility? - GOV.UK](#)
- [RoSPA - Transporting Children with Additional Needs](#)
- [RoSPA - Car seats - RoSPA](#)
Informative guide to choosing the right car seat.
- [RoSPA - Which Care Seat Should I Pick?](#)
Choosing the right care seat at-a-glance chart.
- [Good Egg Car Safety](#)

Useful Company/Manufacturer Links

- [Bestvest - Seatbelt Positioning Vest](#)
Ensures appropriate seat belt geometry; Can be worn in conjunction with a booster seat.
- [Crelling Harnesses](#)

Please note guidance - [Vehicle Harnesses Policy](#)

A Crelling harness is NOT classified as a safety harness, but a postural support harness that aids in the prevention of injury.

A vehicle safety belt (seat belt) MUST be worn over the top of Crelling harnesses unless exempt for medical reason.

- [In Car Safety Centre](#)

Provides a helpline and impartial consultations by appointment.

Telephone 01908 220 909.

- [Windmill Special Needs Co. Ltd.](#)

Both offer a selection of harnesses and car seat are available for trial and families are advised further regarding correct fitting and use.

- [Buckle Guard](#)

Car seatbelt buckle guard to help reduce accidental un-clipping of car seatbelt buckle.

- [Unique Mobility](#)