

Are Used Car Seats Safe?

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends against buying used car seats at garage sales or thrift shops. Often these seats are missing parts, damaged, or on recall. There is no way to check them thoroughly without the complete manufacturer's instruction booklet. They may even have invisible damage from a crash.

If a family has been given a seat by a friend or relative, the following checklist may help them decide if they want to use the seat.

1. **Identify the safety seat.** Check stickers on the plastic shell (sides, back, or bottom) of the seat for the model name (may not be present), model number, manufacturer, and date of manufacture (usually on a computer-printed label; not the tiny date pre-printed in the corner of the label). This information is needed before continuing with the checklist. Also look for the sticker stating that the seat was made for use in motor vehicles.
2. **Do not use a safety seat past its expiration date or if date is unknown.** It is best to use a current model due to revisions in federal safety standards and design improvements that may make it easier to use correctly. Expiration periods, ranging from 4 to 10 years, are specified by each manufacturer (check instructions or call). Look for the expiration date stamped into the plastic of the seat. Depending on climate conditions and how much the seat is used, materials could deteriorate over time.
3. **Get a copy of the manufacturer's instruction booklet.** Download instructions from the manufacturer's Web site or find the company's telephone number on a sticker. Be sure to read and follow the instructions carefully. More than 90% of all safety seats inspected at voluntary checkups are being used incorrectly. Improper installation can seriously affect the performance of the seat.
4. **Check that all parts are present,** as shown in the instructions, including hardware, straps, foam inserts, and chest clips. Many of these parts can be purchased from the manufacturer, but the seat must not be used until everything is in place.
5. **Find out if the seat has been recalled** by calling the manufacturer or checking the most current recall list at www.carseat.org. If there has been a recall, the broken or defective part must be replaced before use.
6. **Check the seat carefully** for evidence of cracking, twisting, worn harness webbing, or broken buckles. If there is any visible damage, do not use the seat.
7. **Never use a car seat that has been involved in a crash!** Be sure to find out about the history of any recycled safety restraint you are offered by friends or relatives. If you are unable to verify the history of the seat, do not use it.
8. **When in doubt, don't!** When the safety of your child is at stake, the purchase of a brand new safety seat may be the **real** bargain — especially if you choose one you can use for several years!
9. **Please recycle.** Don't dispose of an old or damaged seat by putting it out with your trash or in a dumpster! Someone may pick it up and use it for a child. To find out how to properly recycle unusable safety seats to protect children and the environment, download #677 at www.carseat.org or call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.
10. **Be a safety advocate.** Consider visiting local garage sales and thrift shops to educate those selling used seats about the risks and offer to dispose of them properly. Check the law in your state (Example: In California, selling a safety seat which was involved in a crash is against the law. Auto insurers are required to replace them.) Download or request SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. forms #434, 434CA, 434SM, and 435.

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