

Keeping Children Safe: Lap-Only Seatbelts & Child Car Seats



A guide for Family Day Care educators

When transporting other people's children, the goal is to use the safest possible practice, not just what the law allows. Car seat research shows that some common set-ups like lap-only belts with boosters or H-harnesses are far less protective than using lap-sash seatbelts.

Why Lap-Sash Seatbelts Are Safer

- Lap-sash seatbelts have both a lap strap and a shoulder strap.
- They spread crash forces across the strongest parts of a child's body (hips and shoulder).
- A lap-only belt restrains only the hips, increasing the risk of serious injuries to the head, spine and internal organs in a collision.

Best Practice for Car Seat Placement

1. Do not use boosters with lap-only belts even with a H-Harness.

If a vehicle seat only has a lap belt, do not install a booster there.

2. Use a child car seat with an in-built harness in any lap-only position. You need to also use the top tether and there needs to be an anchorage point.

3. When carrying three children across the back seat:

- Place the in-built harness seat in the centre (lap-only belt position).
- Put boosters on the outer positions where lap-sash belts are available.

Problems with H-Harnesses

- Research shows H-harnesses are not the safest option.
- They are tricky to fit correctly, and children can "submarine" (slide under the belt) when the lap portion rides up instead of sitting low over the hips.
- Misuse can lead to serious injuries.



Vehicle Choice Matters

- Ideally, transport children in vehicles with lap-sash belts in every seating position and a 5-star ANCAP safety rating.
- Older cars without these features cannot meet the highest safety standards.

Key Takeaway

Legal minimums set the floor—not the ceiling. Family Day Care educators have a duty of care to choose best-practice safety every time they transport children.

Whenever possible:

- **Use lap-sash seatbelts** with booster seats.
- **Avoid H-harnesses** and lap-only belts.
- **Select vehicles** that provide modern safety features.

For more information > childroadsafety.org.au

Presented by



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA



Transport
Accident
Commission