



## **BLOG: High-back boosters vs. backless boosters**

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We know that big kids should use a booster seat until they fit the adult seat belt properly without one — but which booster seat should you choose for your growing child and why? Is one safer than the other?

### **How do high-back and backless booster seats work?**

Adult seat belts don't fit a child's smaller body until he or she is nearly the size of an adult. Both types of booster seats work by raising the child up so that the seat belt fits correctly to protect a child in a crash.

Without a booster seat we know that the seat belt, while still preventing ejection, can do a lot of internal damage when it rides up over a child's soft belly. When the shoulder belt doesn't fit correctly, it is common for children to tuck it under their arm or behind their back, putting them at risk for severe injuries to the head, neck and spine.

### **Are all booster seats safe?**

All boosters lift the child up and have some way to guide the seat belt and keep it in place. Both high-back and backless booster seats sold in Canada are tested to the same standard and are safe when used as directed.

## **Fit is key!**

The key to making sure that you are using a booster seat safely is fit! The lap belt should fit snug on the child's hips touching the thighs and should not ride up on the belly. The shoulder belt should lay flat across the chest and collarbone resting halfway between the child's neck and shoulder.

## **What can you do to get a better fit?**

If the seat belt doesn't fit correctly when using a booster seat– there are steps you can take:

- If the armrests adjust, try raising or lowering them
- On a high-back booster, try raising or lowering the back or headrest.
- On a backless booster, if there is a guide for the shoulder belt, try using it.
- Read the booster seat manual to ensure that you are using it correctly as directed.
- Check the vehicle manual to see if you may recline the vehicle seat slightly to improve the fit.
- Try using another seating position in the car.
- Try a different booster seat. This one may not be a good fit for your car or your child.

## **So let's get back to the question – High back vs. backless: what's the difference?**

The biggest difference is the most obvious one: head support. A backless booster seat doesn't have a back and must be used with a high vehicle seat or vehicle headrest. A child must have head support to the tops of his or her ears – a high-back booster can provide that support. After the high back has been outgrown by height or fit, the child may still require a booster seat and may need to move to a seating position that has an adjustable headrest.

## **Are there any other benefits to using a high-back booster seat?**

To use a booster seat correctly children must sit straight and tall and not lean out of a booster. A high-back booster provides a physical reminder for a younger child of where they must sit to stay safe.

A high-back booster may offer additional side-impact protection in the event of a crash. Side-impact testing is not a requirement in Canada and so we don't know how a high-back might perform over a backless seat in this way.

## **How can I increase my child's safety in a booster seat?**

1. Wait to use a booster seat until your child is older and bigger. Use a seat with a 5-point harness longer.
2. Use the booster correctly on every ride including when with grandparents, friends and in taxis.
3. Keep kids in the backseat. Kids are safest in the backseat away from the front seat airbags.
4. Use the booster seat for longer. Most kids don't fit the adult seat belt safely until 10-12 years old!