

AA Motoring Trust Reveals Child Seat Misfitting Dangers

New research from The AA Motoring Trust has revealed how basic mistakes by adults when fitting child seats can kill and injure children, even in low speed crashes. Tests carried out at just 19 mph with seats that had been fitted incorrectly produced results which would have seriously injured any child sitting in them.

Every year over 100,000 children are involved in crashes where it is crucial how well the child seat is fitted. Most children receive little more than a jolt or a shock, but 10,000 are hurt, with 670 seriously injured and 30 killed.

In some cases the child had been completely unrestrained, but in others the child was sitting in a poorly fitted seat.

Andrew Howard, head of road safety at The AA Motoring Trust, says: Fitting a child seat incorrectly is a serious issue and one that parents or childminders must not ignore. We estimate that around two thirds of all child seats are incorrectly fitted and a third could cause serious injury to the child.

Sometimes parents make mistakes fitting seats, sometimes they take short cuts or make compromises in how they are worn in an effort to keep children quiet. Using a child seat is not always straightforward and parents need to invest time in checking the seat is fitted properly before setting out on every journey.

The tests were carried out by experts from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) at the Britax test facility in Andover, Hampshire, using realistic child dummies sitting in Britax child restraints. The seats were deliberately installed incorrectly to illustrate the consequences of misfitting.

The research simulated various misfitting scenarios all based on real-life accidents where children had been killed or seriously injured. These included a situation where no seat belt had been used; a child unfastening his own harness; a child kneeling on the back seat; a wrongly fitted combination restraint, which is used to carry babies and toddlers; a child who was wearing the adult seatbelt incorrectly; a mother who was holding her child on her lap; a wrongly fitted infant carrier; and where too much strain had been placed on the seatbelt buckle.

One test replicated a crash where a boy was killed by massive internal injuries when the car in which he was travelling skidded and hit a tree. He died because he wasn't wearing his seat belt properly. The adult belt was uncomfortable, so his parents routed the diagonal strap behind his back and left the lap belt lying across his tummy. When the car crashed his body jack-knifed causing massive internal injuries.

In another, an 18-month-old baby suffered a fractured skull and serious brain damage because his infant carrier had been fitted incorrectly. The adult belt used to attach the carrier to the seat had been misrouted. The lap part of the belt followed the route designed for the diagonal part and vice versa.

The information is available in the [Child Car Seat campaign](#) section of this website, and 30,000 booklets will also be distributed with the information during this year.

Howard says: Using any child restraint is better than none, but parents and child minders need to be aware that every child seat is different and it is vital that they understand how it is fitted in their car before they travel with their children.

To solve the problem of misfitting The AA Motoring Trust is hopeful that a genuinely universal ISOFIX system, which received a safety award at the AA Awards ten years ago, will be adopted by car manufacturers and child seat manufacturers.

He adds: A universal ISOFIX system would make all child seats capable of being fitted in every model of car across Europe. It would dramatically reduce misfitting, eliminate compatibility problems between different car makes and seat and would cut death and injury.

To make ISOFIX universal, a secure third point or attachment from the top of the child restraint to the top of the car seat or parcel shelf would need to be fitted.

NOTE TO EDITORS

The tests were undertaken by TRL for The AA Motoring Trust at the Britax testing facility. The child restraints used in the tests were provided by Britax and deliberately installed so as to illustrate the consequences of misuse for children. These misuses can occur with all makes of child restraint.

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Institute of Advanced Motorists

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