SAFE SKIES: A FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S GUIDE TO

CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY IN THE AIR

by
Lia Tuso
CPST, CPSAC, STAC

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ABOUT

The Author

Lia Tuso is a nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technician in the United States, Canada and Australia. Additionally, she has specialized training in Safe Transport for All Children (STAC). As a frequent traveler and toddler mom, Lia is passionate about promoting safe air travel for children. She collaborates with the Federal Aviation Administration to provide reliable, up-to-date guidance on child safety and accessibility practices in aviation.

Lia's mission is to empower caregivers with the knowledge and confidence they need to ensure their children's safety during air travel.

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TO BEGIN...

What is a CRS?

CRS stands for Child Restraint System. Sometimes you may hear it referred to s a CRD (Child Restraint Device).

There are only three types of CRS/CRD that may be used on U.S. Domestic Airlines:

- FAA Accepted Car Seats
- Car Seats with an appropriate approval label from a foreign government
- FAA Approved CARES Harness by AmSafe.

Using a CRS for these categories of children ensures that they have the highest level of protection available during air travel, aligning with the safety recommendations of aviation authorities and child safety experts.

Who should use a CRS?

- *Infants (Under 2 Years Old):*
  - Infants, especially those under 2 years old, should use a rear-facing CRS while occupying their own seat.

- *Toddlers and Children:*
  - Toddlers and Children under 40 pounds should use a CRS secured in the airplane seat in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions that is appropriate for their weight and size. If a child is over 40lbs and requires a car seat at your destination, parents may consider using it onboard, as it's the safest way to transport it. International Authorities like EASA, Transport Canada and the ICAO state that children should use a CRS until approximately 7 years old and 49 inches. They have concluded that the aircraft lap belt does not provide an appropriate potential for safe transport to younger children and infant.

- *Children with Special Needs:*
  - Special Considerations: Children with medical conditions may require a CRS for their safe travel, regardless of their age. These systems can provide additional support to the user in an upright position tailored to their specific needs.

BUT WHY SHOULD WE USE A

Car Seat?

IT IS THE SAFEST WAY FOR CHILDREN TO FLY

The safest place for a child under the age of two on a U.S. airplane is in approved child restraint system (CRS) or device, not in lap. (FAA).

1. Safety During the Flight
The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) strongly recommends the use of a CRS for children on aircraft. This recommendation underscores that a CRS provides a secure, dedicated space for the child, significantly reducing the risk of injury during turbulence, runway emergencies, or accidents.

2. Safest Way to Transport The Car Seat
The safest way to ensure the safety and integrity of a car seat is by transporting it in the aircraft cabin, instead of as a piece of checked luggage. When parents check a car seat, it may be exposed to damaging conditions.

3. Comfort & Convenience
Children will likely be more comfortable in a familiar environment. Additionally, having the CRS onboard ensures the child is properly restrained during the flight, offering peace of mind and a smoother travel experience for the whole family. It also keeps children away from the aisle where Flight Attendants have beverage carts, or passengers may drop luggage when trying to retrieve from the overhead bin.

BUT WHY ARE THEY ALLOWED?

THE REALITY OF

In-Lap Infants

In-lap (lap-held) infants (children under two years old who sit on an adult's lap during the flight) are not a safe option. ,The FAA, Transport Canada, and CASA conclude with the same result: holding an infant in yours or on your lap poses significant risk for severe injuries.

You're probably wondering "If we know it's not safe - why do we allow it?"

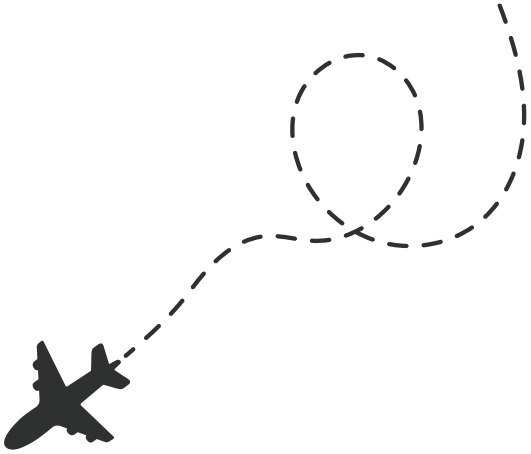
Airlines allow in-lap infants (children under two years old who sit on an adult's lap during the flight) to fly for free. Early regulations allowed lap children, and the cost analysis doesn't support the regulatory change. For instance, if airlines required every passenger to pay for an occupied seat, it increases the price per family (the targeted audience). Price affects consumer decisions, and an increase in the price of a flight might lead families to drive which has an increased risk for injury.

Flexibility and Convenience

The policy of allowing in-lap infants provides flexibility and convenience to families, making air travel more accessible. The flexibility allows parents to make decisions based on their individual needs and financial situations.

The FAA has conducted cost-benefit analyses to assess the implications of requiring all children under two to occupy their own seat. The findings highlight the financial impact on families and the potential unintended consequences. According to the FAA's analysis:

- *Financial Burden*: Requiring a separate seat for every infant could significantly increase travel costs for families, potentially leading to fewer families being able to afford air travel.
- *Alternative Travel Risks*: The FAA considered that if air travel became too expensive, some families might choose to drive long distances instead. Statistically, vehicle travel presents a higher risk of injury and fatalities compared to air travel. Therefore, mandating separate seats for infants under two might inadvertently lead to higher overall transportation injuries or death.



“There is a definite hazard inherent in air travel by infants and young children without proper restraint.” (FAA)

Safety Trade-Off

The analysis weighs the relatively low risk of air travel with in-lap infants against the potential increase in risk from increased road travel. The FAA concluded that the overall risk of injury or fatality might increase if families opted to drive rather than fly due to higher costs associated with requiring every passenger to occupy their own seat on planes.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

BEST PRACTICE

Child restraint systems (CRS) on aircraft provide the same critical protection for infants and young children as car seats do in vehicles, especially during ground incidents such as hard landings, aborted takeoffs, or runway excursions. Just as a properly installed car seat helps distribute crash forces and prevent ejection in a vehicle collision, an FAA-approved CRS secures a child in their seat, reducing the risk of injury during sudden deceleration or turbulence. Lap-held infants, while seemingly secure in a guardian's arms, are at significant risk during impact, as no parent can physically restrain a child against the extreme forces experienced in an emergency. Additionally, in the event of an emergency evacuation, a restrained child remains secured in their seat, preventing panic and making evacuation more efficient. Flight attendants play a crucial role in ensuring CRS are correctly installed and used, enhancing overall cabin safety and reinforcing best practices for child passenger protection.

Children who are under the age of 2 are best protected in the rear-facing position onboard an aircraft. Children over the age of 2 should remain rear-facing on an airplane until the reach the maximum height or weight of their car seat as set by the car seat manufacturer.

The safest place for a child under the age of two on a U.S. airplane is in approved child restraint system (CRS) or device, not on a caregiver's lap. (FAA)

“We recommend a worldwide harmonisation regarding the following core statement(s)... All passengers, including infants, obtain a seat of their own.”

-INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

RESOURCES FOR

Research & Data

Helpful and reliable resources for more information.

01

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY

This study on Child Restraint Systems was carried out by TÜV Rheinland Kraftfahrt GmbH, Team Aviation, by order of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). This study addresses injuries caused by turbulence, aborted take-off, hard landings and/or in emergency landing conditions, of children, particularly those 2 or less years old (infants), on board aircraft used for commercial transport of passengers.

Read More >

02

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

“Let me be clear, the FAA does not consider lap-infants to be safe should an accident or severe turbulence occur. We agree that the safest place for children is in their own aircraft seat with their own approved CRS.” - Cabin Safety Inspector Catherine Burnett

Read More >

03

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

"If there is turbulence, or worse, it may not be physically possible to protect your baby in your arms. Turbulence is the number one cause of children's injuries on an airplane." - AAP

Read More >

04

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

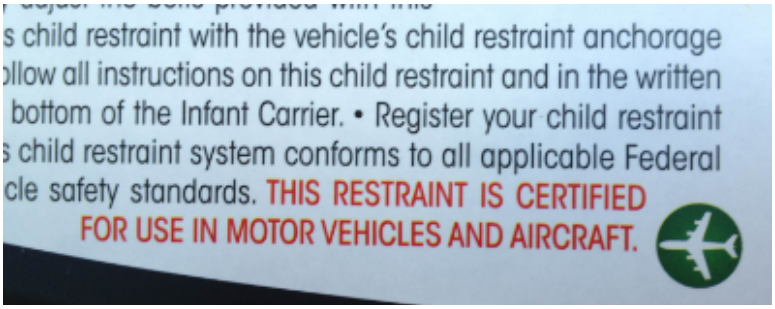
"The NTSB promotes child occupant safety in all modes of transportation with a focus on educating parents and caregivers about ways to keep children safe when traveling."

Read More >

It's important to get your information from reliable sources. Reference your Airline's OM. Visit the FAA or consult a Child Passenger Safety Technician.

NAVIGATING

The Basics



Understanding the Basic Designs of a CRS approved for use on an Aircraft:
The CRS should have a solid back and seat (no booster seats), The CRS should have internal restraint harness, and the CRS must have a label showing approval for aviation use.

How to install a car seat on an airplane:
To ensure the caregiver is acting in compliance with the FAA Regulations, Flight Attendants should have a basic understanding of how to install a car seat. If you are given an opportunity to install, I highly recommend practicing on your own. You are NOT responsible for installing a car seat for a passenger - but it is helpful to have a basic understanding to ensure the safety of all of your passengers.

watch the FAA's videos to learn how to secure a CRS in an airplane seat.

Aircraft Seat Restrictions
As you know, some aircraft seat configurations, such as those in exit rows, forward and aft of exit rows, and some premium class seats may not accommodate car seats. Your airline may have policies regarding seating placements for CRS use *in addition to* the FAA Regulation that states.

NAVIGATING

CRS Placement

Placement of a Child Restraint System (CRS) on an Aircraft

- **Seat Placement**
  - **Must** be installed in a forward-facing **aircraft** seat.
  - Follow the CRS label instructions for forward- or rear-facing based on the child's size. **CHILDREN OF ANY AGE CAN REAR-FACE AS LONG AS THEY STILL FIT WITHIN THE CRS MANUFACTURERS WEIGHT/HEIGHT LIMITS. YOUR AIRLINE CANNOT REQUIRE OLDER CHILDREN TO FORWARD-FACE**
  - Preferred location: Window seat.
  - Other locations may be acceptable if they do not block passenger access to the aisle.
  - Yes, multiple car seats may be seated next to each other. There is no FAA Regulation prohibiting this.
- **Aisle Seats**
  - CRS **should not** be placed in an aisle seat.
  - Can obstruct evacuation and slow down emergency exits.
  - May block flight attendants from reaching emergency exits.
- **Emergency Exit Rows**
  - CRS **should not** be placed in rows directly in front of or behind emergency exit rows, but the policy is determined by your individual airline.
  - Exit areas need to remain clear for quick evacuation.
  - If an emergency exit requires the seat back to fold down, a CRS placement may need restrictions.
- **Airline Operator Considerations**
  - Airlines determine the safest seat locations for CRS based on their procedures. Reference your Airline’s specific CRS policy for further guidance.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF

Approval Labels

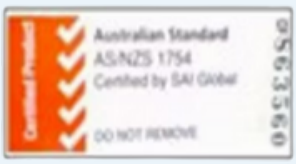
Required Labels

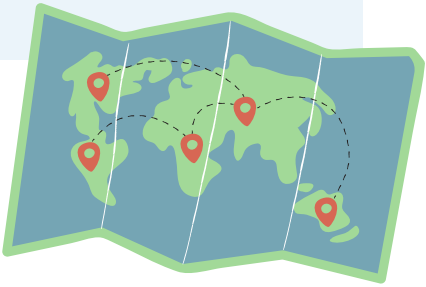
- CRS must display two labels, often combined into one.
- Label must include:
  - “This child restraint system conforms to all applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.”
  - “This Restraint is Certified for Use in Motor Vehicles and Aircraft” (in red lettering).

- CRS must have:
  - Approval label **from a foreign government.** The CRS does not need to be an American Car Seat, as long as it has an approval label from a foreign govnerment, or a
  - Label showing compliance with United Nations (UN) standards (with an “E” mark and country approval number).

Canada

Australia / New Zealand

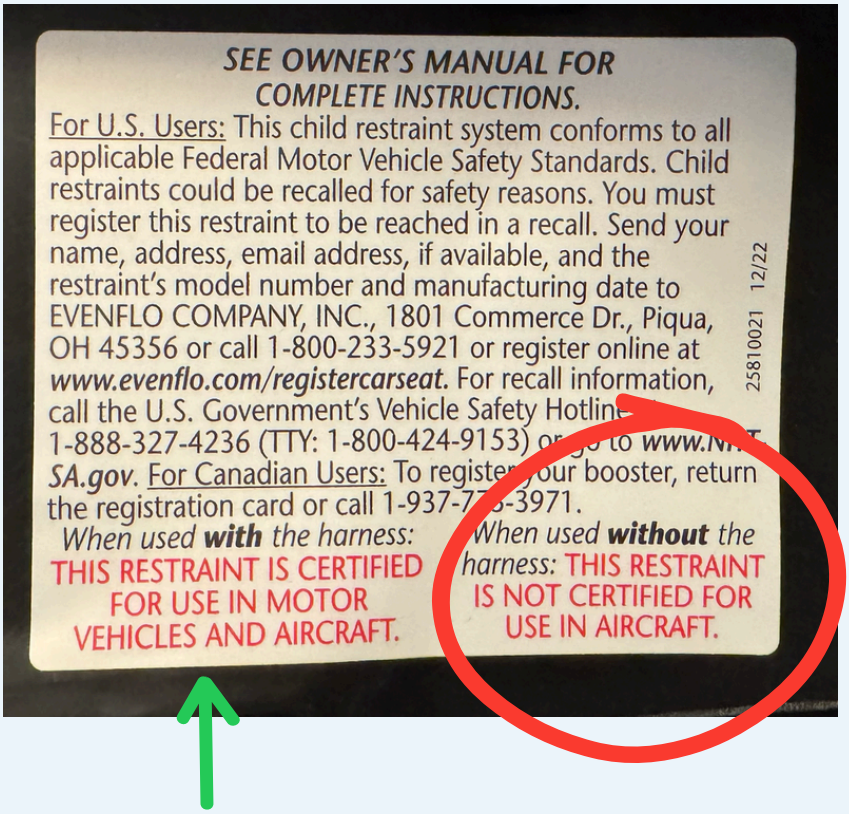




THE COMPLEXITIES OF

Approval Labels

Don't be confused by this label...



First, read the label that is circled in red.

Some car seats that have a five-point harness may convert to a booster seat later, as the child grows. These seats will have the required language for aircraft use AND will have ADDITIONAL language clarifying that it may NOT be used on the airplane when it is in booster mode.

Oftentimes, if we see the words "NOT CERTIFIED" we assume that cannot be used at all, when in fact, it can be used in the five-point harness mode.

Now I encourage you to go back, and read the language above the green arrow. As you can see - this is easily overlooked as the word NOT is more attention grabbing. If you are dealing with a car seat that converts to a booster - this language should be expected.

NAVIGATING

Types of Car Seats

Infant Carrier (Rear-Facing Only)

Infant Carriers have an identifiable handle on them assist the caregiver in 'carrying' the seat. Infant carriers are rear-facing only and **MUST be used in the rear-facing position on the aircraft.**
If a caregiver's infant carrier does not fit appropriately in their assigned seat, **You may not ask them to turn their rear-facing only car seat into the forward-facing position.** This is a direct violation of FAA Regulation and against the car seat manufacturer's requirements.

You are obligated to attempt to relocate them to an accommodating seat in the same class of service. We acknowledge this may not provide a solution. If possible, you may instruct the caregiver to first raise the aircraft armrest, place the car seat on the middle seat, and then slide it into the window seat. (Versus lowering the car seat into the window seat and having it get caught on the tray table of the passenger seatback Infront.

Convertible Car Seat

Convertible Car Seats 'convert' from rear to forward facing position. Once a child has maxed out the rear-facing limits for height OR weight, they may transition to the forward-facing position.

Transitioning before the manufacturer's minimum height/weight requirements is unsafe. Today, many convertible car seats will accommodate children in the rear-facing position until 4 years or older. **Even in an aircraft, rear-facing is the safest way for a child to fly**. Don't be surprised if you see a seemingly older or larger child in the rear-facing position. If you want to learn more, discuss the car seat manufacturer's guidelines with the caregiver. **The height and weight will be written on a sticker label directly on the car seat.**

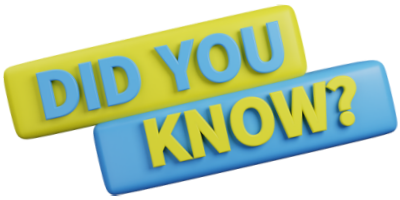
NAVIGATING

Types of Car Seats

Forward-Facing Only

Forward Facing Car Seats are for older children. Oftentimes, children will remain in their forward-facing car seat until their 6th or 7th birthday before transitioning to a booster seat.

Requesting that a caregiver check their FAA Accepted car seat, for a child who still fits within the manufacturer's height/weight limits is a direct violation of FAA Regulation. **There is no age, weight or height limit that prohibits a child from using an appropriate CRS.** In fact, it should be celebrated when an older toddler or child is using a CRS onboard, as it is still the safest way for any child to fly.



Every booster seat requires a lap and shoulder belt. Most commercial airlines do not have a shoulder belt. However, there are newer and novel seats that may have both a lap and shoulder belt. Even still, booster seats are NOT permitted for use because of the risk for injury to a child should the seatback fold in on them.

Booster Seats are never permitted for use during take-off, taxi, landing and seatbelt sign on. Because they are child safety devices, some airlines will allow caregivers to bring them on the aircraft free of charge, in addition to carry-on luggage allowance.

It's important to know your airline's policies regarding booster seats. Some airlines may permit their use at cruising altitude when the seatbelt sign is off. Caregivers may place these devices under the seat infront of them or in the overhead bin for transport.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF

the FAA CARES Harness

For children who weigh 22-44lbs and under 40inches

The CARES Harness is the only FAA Approved harness and is manufactured by AmSafe, Inc.

The CARES Harness works by securing around the airplane seat and then attaching to the aircraft's seatbelt. It does not affect the tray table or TV screen of the aft passenger.

While the CARES harness offers significant convenience, it's important to know the CARES harness does not fit children appropriately until they're closer to the 44lb maximum.

Oftentimes, the CARES Harness is outgrown by height before weight, meaning caregivers will need to switch back to using a car seat on the aircraft.

This device is also **very challenging** for children to use correctly, because they need to maintain a bum-to-the-back, upright seating position. For this reason, caregivers may place a thin piece of yoga mat, or a rubber shelf liner underneath the child to prevent them from submarining under the aircraft seatbelt

Additionally, there are many **knock-offs** available for purchase online. ALWAYS verify the harness being used is a legitimate CARES Harness manufactured by AMSAFE. Knock-offs will not have the DMF D number written with marker on it **(as circled in the image above).**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT MY

INSTAGRAM HIGHLIGHT LABELED "FAA CARES"

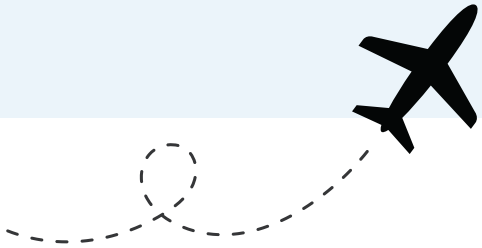
POPULAR DEVICES THAT

ARE NOT CRS

BABY WEARING, BOOSTERS, BEDS, BASSINETS & BELLY BELT LOOPS

Some international airlines use Supplementary Loop Belts (aka Belly Belt Loops) onboard their aircrafts. It's important to know that neither the FAA nor Transport Canada permit the use of supplementary loop belts (belly belts) onboard their aircrafts. "When used on an infant, the loop belt rests entirely within the infant's abdominal region, which will likely result in severe internal injuries in an accident. In an accident, the infant acts as an energy absorbing element for the adult's body, which performs a jack-knife movement over the infant. While the impact loads are reduced for the adult, the load on the infant is further increased due to the crushing forces from the adult torso" (FAA). The FAA and Transport Canada recommend the use of an approved child restraint system, which provides the best protection for the infant or child and minimizes the effects of unanticipated turbulence

Oftentimes, long-haul flights will have bassinets available. Usually, the bassinet is reserved at the time of booking, or by calling the airline ahead of a caregiver's travels. While they're a great option for comfort, they are not Child Restraint Devices. They must be stowed during take-off, taxi, and landing. Flight Attendants should also instruct caregivers to remove their child from the bassinet when the seatbelt sign is on. There are also age and size restrictions for using the bassinet, you have a right to confirm the child's age/weight/height with the caregiver to ensure proper use of the bassinet. For your reference, I've put a list of popular airline bassinet policies here.



POPULAR DEVICES THAT

ARE NOT CRS

BABY WEARING, BOOSTERS, BEDS, BASSINETS & BELLY BELT LOOPS

Airline Employees should understand that certified Child Restraint Systems (CRS) are rigorously tested for safety in various crash scenarios and are designed to protect children during travel. These systems meet strict government standards and are specifically built to withstand forces experienced in aircraft incidents.

In contrast, items like baby wraps, slings, booster seats or carriers are not subjected to the same testing and are not approved for use during critical flight phases, such as taxi, takeoff, and landing per FAA Regulations. Using untested items like baby wraps can increase the risk of injury, as they lack the structural integrity and restraint systems required to keep a child safe in the event of turbulence or an emergency.

Babywearing is not permitted during take-off, taxi, and landing for this reason. Flight Attendants should encourage caregivers to comply with FAA regulations by requesting the baby be removed from the carrier for take-off, taxi, landing and whenever the seatbelt sign is on. Flight attendants should feel confident in explaining to the caregiver the reasons behind this regulation (as noted above) to mitigate risks of parental pushback and escalated conversations.

Image from ATSB

LET'S TALK ABOUT

First Class

Car seats aren't permitted in a number of first class cabins due to seat installation angle in "newer and novel seat configurations that present injury risks that aren't as well protected using traditional means of compliance." (FAA)

Car Seats are NOT Permitted in these First Class Cabins

United Polaris

business on Boeing 767, 777, 787.

American

First in airbus 321T Business on Boeing 777-200, 777-300, 787-800,787-900

Delta

Flatbed seats in Delta One of the airbus 330-200 or a330-300

JetBlue

Car seats *are* allowed in Mint seats *only* on A321 Classic Mint (32S) aircraft. They are **not permitted in Mint** seats on A321 NEO Mint (3NS) or A321 LR (3NL) aircraft

QUOTE BY LIA TUSO

"Child safety should always be a top priority... even at 30,000 feet."

POPULAR (BUT NOT ALL)

FAA Accepted Infant Car Seats

DOONA

Infant height: up to 32 in / 81.3 cm

Infant weight: 4 - 35 lbs / 1.8 -15.8 kg

Product Weight: Approximately 17.2lbs

NUNA PIPA URBN

Infant Height: up to 29 inches

Infant Weight: 4-22lbs

Total Weight: Approximately 9 lbs

EVENFLO SHYFT DUALRIDE

Infant Height: 15.7 - 32.0 in

Infant Weight 3.0 - 35.0 lbs

Product Weight: Approximately 20lbs with stroller

Some of the links above are affiliate links, meaning I may earn a commission if you make a purchase, at no extra cost to you.

POPULAR (BUT NOT ALL)

FAA Accepted Convertible Car Seats

COSCO SCENERA NEXT

Child Weight: 5-40lbs RF / 22-40lbs FF

Child Height: 40 inches RF / 43 inches FF

Product Weight: Approximately 7lbs

MAXI COSI ROMI

Child Weight: 5-40lbs RF / 22-40lbs FF

Child Height: 40 inches RF / 43 inches FF

Product Weight: Approximately 8lbs

GRACO CONTENDER

Child Weight: 5-40lbs RF / 22-65lbs FF

Child Height: head must be at least 1" below headrest adjustment handle RF / 49inches FF

Product Weight: Approximately 16lbs

Some of the links above are affiliate links, meaning I may earn a commission if you make a purchase, at no extra cost to you.

POPULAR (BUT NOT ALL)

FAA Accepted Forward-Facing Car Seats

COSCO FINALE

Child Weight: 30-65lbs

Child Height: 32-49 inches

Product Weight: Approximately 7lbs

Converts to booster: YES

WAYB PICO

Child Weight: 22-50lbs

Child Height: 30-45 inches

Product Weight: Approximately 8lbs

Converts to booster: NO

SAFETY 1ST COMFORT RIDE

Child Weight: 30-65lbs

Child Height: 34-49 inches

Product Weight: Approximately 12lbs

Converts to booster: YES

Some of the links above are affiliate links, meaning I may earn a commission if you make a purchase, at no extra cost to you.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

KINDNESS

Flight attendants are the front line of passenger safety, and when a caregiver goes through the effort of bringing a child restraint system (CRS) onboard, it should be met with appreciation and support. These parents have navigated the airport, security, and boarding process while lugging a car seat—not out of convenience, but out of a deep commitment to their child's safety. Instead of assuming confusion or inconvenience, assume their intent: they are trying to do the right thing. Approach them with kindness and encouragement, congratulating them for prioritizing safety in a system that often makes it difficult. Some caregivers may unknowingly have a counterfeit CARES harness, or they may worry about disturbing the passenger in front of them, but it is crucial to remember that **no passenger's comfort overrides another's safety**. The child in the CRS is just as much a paying passenger as anyone else, and their protection should be upheld with the same level of care as every other safety protocol onboard. Every CRS interaction is an opportunity to educate, support, and reinforce best practices, while also deepening your own knowledge as a flight attendant.

You have the authority to make judgment calls in the best interest of overall flight safety, and by handling CRS situations with confidence and compassion, you are not just enforcing policy—you are shaping a safer future for flying families.

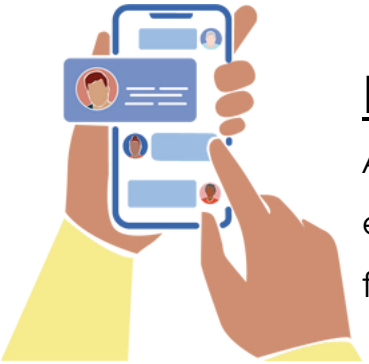
MORE GOOD THINGS

Freebies for you!

GET THE CHEAT SHEETS!

949. AIR CARRIER OPERATIONS BULLETIN

ADVISORY CIRCULAR 120 - 87c



PRIVATE INDUSTRY FB GROUP!

Ask child safety questions to peers and industry experts. Learn from each other - all in one place just for you!

CHILD SAFETY IN THE SKIES!

The most informative educational opportunity for those who are looking to learn more about CRS use on aircrafts - *presented by the Federal Aviation Administration*

SAFE SKIES PODCAST WITH LIA TUSO

Chat with me on the Safe Skies with Lia Tuso Podcast - the ultimate podcast about flying with kids! From Child Restraint Use to navigating TSA with toddlers, tune in to learn more!

THANK YOU

Wishing you Happy and Safe Travels

xoxo, Lia

Contact me!

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Email :	info@liatuso.com
Website :	www.liatuso.com

WORKS

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