

SCIENCE AND THE CONSUMER

● Car Seat Safety

Air bags have saved the lives of many adults involved in automobile accidents. However, there has been much concern about their safety in accidents involving children. Because air bags were specifically designed for adults, children aged 12 and under are safest when properly restrained in the back seat of a car.

For infants and toddlers, being properly restrained means traveling in a car safety seat that has been correctly installed in the back seat. However, studies have revealed that up to 80 percent of car seats are installed or used incorrectly. In many instances, the safety belt is not holding the car seat in place securely. Other common problems involve incorrect use of the fasteners on the car seat's harness.

A Law to Regulate How Safety Seats Are Attached

On February 27, 1999, President Clinton announced that a new federal law requiring “a simple, universal system for attaching car safety seats” would go into effect by the year 2000. All safety seats will have attachments designed to fit three standard anchors in the back seat of every car.

Your Turn to Think

1. Why are children safer in the back seat of a car than in the front seat?
2. Explain how the law requiring a standard attachment system in car seats will improve child safety.
3. Which part of the back seat of a car—the left side, the right side, or the middle—do you think is the safest place for a child safety seat? Explain.