

## Transporting Children in Vehicles

Everybody must be adequately secured when in a vehicle. Children with disabilities often require special consideration when being transported and may need alternatives to the standard car seats and restraints. All babies (up to 9kg) must be carried in a rear facing infant seat. They then may move towards a forward facing car seat with a multi point harness (up to approximately 18kg). Finally a booster seat with a low or high back can be used (up to 32kg) with a lap sash belt and with or without a harness.

*Please note that it is very important to consult with an Occupational Therapist and Queensland Transport to assist in selecting the most suitable vehicle restraint system for children with special needs.*

### HARNESSES

Under Queensland Transport guidelines, harnesses must always be used in conjunction with the car's standard lap or lap/sash belt. These additional harnesses are postural supports and should be labelled as such, as they are not a replacement to the car's safety belt.

It is required by law that only one release point is used. If extra release points are attached and required as well as a normal seat belt, a letter from a medical practitioner is required to be carried in the vehicle at all times explaining the reasons why the child is wearing this.

'H' Harnesses (not pictured) are available from children's stores. 'H' harnesses use the existing seat belt which is threaded through the harness and two straps that go across the shoulders. A tether strap then anchors to the car's existing anchorage point for baby capsules and car seats.

Specialised harnesses are available for children requiring more support or who may wriggle out of a 'H' harness. Most have a vest made from webbing strap, which can be put on outside the vehicle. The car's safety belt is threaded through and an additional tether strap secured to the car anchor point or clipped around the seat.

A groin strap can provide additional support and some models have a style which can secure a child in a lying position (a medical certificate may be required to justify use). Some harnesses may also provide additional support by using a frame with padded lateral supports.

### CAR SEATS

Standard booster seats and children's car seats can provide some support, although a child with a disability may require additional support to travel safely in a vehicle.

According to Australian Standards, up to 2kg of foam can be added as padding to provide lateral supports, but you are unable to add this behind or beneath the child.

If it is necessary, for medical reasons, to add supports behind or beneath the child, it is recommended that a letter be obtained from a medical practitioner stating reasons why, and this should be carried in the vehicle at all times.



#### LifeTec Queensland

**BRISBANE**  
Level One, Reading Newmarket  
Cnr Newmarket & Enoggera Roads  
(PO Box 3241), Newmarket Qld 4051  
Phone: 07 3552 9000 or 1300 885 886  
Facsimile: 07 3552 9088

Email: [mail@lifetec.org.au](mailto:mail@lifetec.org.au)  
[www.lifetec.org.au](http://www.lifetec.org.au)  
Independent Living Centre  
Association of Queensland  
Incorporated trading as LifeTec  
Queensland ABN 25 773 960 273

**TOWNSVILLE**  
Shop G-3A, Domain Central  
103 Duckworth Street  
(PO Box 8280), Garbutt, Townsville Qld 4814  
Phone: 07 4759 5600  
Facsimile: 07 4759 5688



It is recommended that a booster seat be located in the centre rear of the vehicle. Specialised car seats are generally larger versions of moulded forward facing car seats. They usually incorporate a five-point harness, may have additional posture pads, and are anchored into a vehicle like standard car seats. They can be used for children up to approximately 46kg.

#### **TRANSPORTING THE CHILD IN THEIR MOBILITY DEVICE**

Sometimes it may be appropriate to transport a child within their mobility device due to their size, postural needs or reducing the needs for transfers.

Some factors to consider include whether the mobility device is appropriate to use in a vehicle; for example inadequate support lightweight construction or dangerous projections.

If in doubt talk to Standards Australia (02 8206 6000) about the appropriate Australian Standard relating to these and Queensland Transport re any specific State legislation.

The car or van would need to be modified to allow access into the vehicle. Some vehicles can be adapted with dropped floors, which may allow for ramp access, while others have a wheelchair loader fitted to raise/lower the child sitting in a wheelchair.

Vans are the most common style used as they may already have adequate headroom for the child sitting in the vehicle, though some station wagons have been modified to incorporate this.

The mobility device needs to be clamped to the floor with a wheelchair restraint system. The child is still required to have a separate occupant restraint system in line with the AS4370: 1996 standards.

#### **CHILDREN WHO UNDO SEAT BELTS AND HARNESSSES**

Children who undo their seat belts or struggle out of harnesses can cause a danger to themselves and others in the vehicle. The difficulty is in adequately restraining them while still allowing quick release in the event of an emergency. Some of the more supportive harnesses and car seats may secure a restless child. A clear moulded plastic sleeve which fits over the seat belt release may prevent a child releasing the seat belt but still allows an adult to achieve this.

#### **NEED TO KNOW MORE?**

Telephone, fax or e-mail your enquiry to obtain further information from one of the therapists about products. Alternatively, you can make an appointment to trial the equipment at our display centres or through our outreach service. Please phone LifeTec for further details.

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Email: [mail@lifetec.org.au](mailto:mail@lifetec.org.au)  
[www.lifetec.org.au](http://www.lifetec.org.au)

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