

# Taking children on trips in vehicles

## Introduction

You want to take children in your care on an outing by vehicle. It's exciting, stimulating for them, but a big undertaking for you! This guidance aims to help by:

1. giving you an understanding of risk management and legal requirements;
2. helping you decide if you really want to make the trip at all, or whether there are other options that may be just as educational and fun and more 'eco';
3. helping you belt the children up safer if you do decide to go; and
4. helping you choose a safer vehicle operator and safer vehicle and driver.

## Not going could be a great option

If organising safe transport just isn't possible, or just too stressful, time-consuming and expensive in your opinion, then the best choice may be simply not to go.

Is there anything that children might appreciate just as much, or even more, within their own community? By not going you are also helping to save the environment and contributing to your eco school status.

For example, you might want to travel to a zoo that is 100 miles away. Why not change your plan and get a local animal sanctuary to bring some animals to your premises? Or visit a local farm that you can walk to? Or go bird spotting with a local authority ranger near your local river?

Another example would be that you want to travel to a theatre to watch a pantomime. Is there a local travelling circus group, or puppet show, or educational theatre group, that could come to your school instead? It will probably cost less and be far more relaxing for you and the children. Just think about all the hassle of those children on a coach all wanting to go to the toilet and fidgeting about.

While these things might not seem so exciting, children can gain great educational benefit from the smallest things, and, if taught well, be thrilled about them; and because you aren't travelling so far, you can spend more time on that education, rather than going there and back.

On the other hand, you may think that a trip is incredibly important to give children, particularly deprived children, an experience they may never otherwise get; such as a trip to a theatre or a zoo. If this is the case, fine, but plan with care!

## Risk management and your legal requirements

Trips are great, and you will already understand the importance of a risk-assessed safe trip.

But have you considered risk management best practice relating to the journey, as well as basic road traffic criminal and civil law requirements? You are advised to apply high safety standards to your journey, that may be significantly higher than the requirements of law. There are two reasons why should do this:

a) To give the best possible protection to the children and adults you are transporting, above and beyond the protection that the minimum standards required by law provide; and

b) To protect you if someone is hurt on your trip. You need to be able to prove that you took all the steps you could to manage the risks of your trip.

You may think:

- that complying with minimum legal requirements is enough. But if you are aware that something practicable above and beyond the law can be done to reduce a risk, then you are duty bound under health and safety legislation's duty of care to take that step.
- that because someone in a position of authority (such as a governor, or a local transport adviser, or a colleague or a boss) has said you only need to comply with minimum legal requirements, then you don't have to do more. You can't abdicate responsibility to someone else in this way, particularly not after you have been given guidance that tells you more about a risk and how to better manage it.
- that because parents have ticked a form giving you permission to transport their child, and they did not require you to follow any particular safety procedure, then you are not liable. Parental permission does not relieve you of responsibility. Equally, you cannot abdicate responsibility to parents by asking them what you should do. They are not risk management professionals with expertise in transport safety, and should not make decisions for you.
- that other factors, such as a slightly greater cost or inconvenience incurred due to implementing safety measures, outweighs your responsibility to manage risk. As well as not being a reasonable defence in court, this just isn't a moral thought process - you are gambling with people's lives to save money, time or something else that is less important. If children were hurt, there is a chance they might die or be permanently paralysed or brain injured. This would have serious repercussions for your reputation and your staff morale.
- that because trips went without a hitch previously, you don't need to improve your safety standard now. Just because nothing has gone wrong so far, it doesn't mean it won't next time.

Health and safety law requires you to manage risk. If a risk is identified and easily-implemented safety measures are recommended, you ignore these measures at your peril. You could not claim ignorance in court. Plan with risk management in mind, and you'll get a good night's sleep the night before your trip!

## Choose a safe vehicle operator

Any company you use to transport children must have good safety standards and a good safety record. We recommend that you stand up for safety and ask the below questions before booking. You don't have to ask these questions verbally; in fact it's better if you get the answers in writing. You could fax or email them the questions:

- How old is the vehicle? (Hire a reasonably new vehicle - it will be more likely to have safety features and be in a good state of repair.)
- When was it last maintained? (Generally, the answer should be within weeks.)
- Does someone do a pre-drive walk-around of the vehicle before it is driven to our premises, to check that basics such as tyres, wheels and lights are in working order?)
- Who does your maintenance? (You want to know that whoever does it is reputable eg. our modern Mercedes Benz coaches are maintained by the local Mercedes Benz specialist garage \*or \*we maintain our coaches in house, but our mechanics receive refresher training directly from Mercedes Benz on a regular basis and are highly qualified and experienced)

- What guarantee can you give me that the driver you provide will be highly trained and have a low crash record? Do your drivers have advanced driving certificates? Are their standards of driving assessed annually by you?
- What guarantee can you give me that the driver you provide will be fit to drive? Do you have any systems in place above and beyond the requirements of driver hours' law to ensure that drivers aren't tired? Do you check your drivers regularly to identify any alcohol or drug abuse?
- Do you record your crashes and near-misses, and, if so, do you have a good and improving record?
- Do you carry out regular risk audits and have you recently implemented any safety measures not identified through the above questions?

Once you have asked these questions of several operators you will have a list of preferred suppliers so you won't have to ask the questions every time you use them - although it is advisable to ask them intermittently (for example, once a year) as part of your road safety policy.

## Hiring a vehicle with 3 point seat belts

Always hire a vehicle that is modern and has 3-point seat belts that are retractable, undamaged, and work, and provide space for the correct fitting of child restraints (seats and booster seats). In other words, seat belts which are just like those in a modern car.

It is important that you explain to the vehicle provider, when booking, that you will not accept any vehicle that has seat belts that are jammed, don't retract, or which are frayed or look in any other way damaged: it would be wise to put this in writing. When your vehicle arrives you should check all seat belts.

Do NOT hire a vehicle that has no seat belts or only lap belts. Lap belts are wholly inadequate. Small children are extremely delicate and their bodies are not fully formed. Restrained by only a lap belt, in a serious crash a small child's body would bend to form a U shape and then whiplash backwards and forwards. These movements can cause death, tetraplegia and critical injuries to internal organs. Coaches and minibuses with 3 point belts are widely available, so there is no excuse for using a vehicle with only lap belts. (In addition, many child seats cannot be fitted only with a lap belt.) There is research evidence that using a three point belt and child seat reduces the risk of injury by 57% compared with using a lap belt on a child. The below two links take you to research demonstrating this:

[Insurance Institute for Highway Safety research on child restraints with the University of Philadelphia](#)

[National Transport Safety Board study on performance of child restraints](#)

## Fitting child seats

Children who are under 150cm in height are safest in a correctly-fitted child seat that is correct for their height and weight. This brings complexities with it when organising group transport, that need to be considered. Please note that this page has a lot of content. You may want to print it off rather than read on screen.

### **Are you sure you can use child seats in your vehicle?**

Before hiring a vehicle in which you intend to use child seats, you need to be sure that the vehicle is designed to carry the child seats you will be using. Ask the provider of the vehicle to tell you the make and type of vehicle they are providing, and ask them to provide written confirmation from the manufacturer that this make and type of vehicle is compatible with child seats for the age range of children you intend to be carried.

### **Are you fitting and sitting correctly?**

Child seats must also be fitted following the seats' manufacturers' instructions using the 3-point belts. Presuming the vehicle is compatible, a child's own seat, brought from their own car, could be fitted by their parent who is familiar with

the fitting instructions. It is equally important that the child is securely and correctly seated and buckled into the seat. Alternatively, you might want the fitting and sitting to be done by an adult carer (because the parent is not around). If the latter is to happen, then the carer should ask parents to provide their seat's instruction manual. It is also recommended that the carer has received professional training on fitting child seats. Some local authorities provide this training: contact your local authority and ask for their expert on child seats in their road safety unit. If your road safety unit cannot provide training, ask if they know any private providers of training who are reputable (they need to be able to demonstrate to you that they have appropriate, up to date qualifications and experience). If your road safety unit can't help you, ring neighbouring councils until you find someone.

Sometimes, transport providers provide child seats for you. If child seats are being provided by the transport provider and not by parents, it is important that they are correct for the children's height and weight. You should check the range of heights and weights of children to be carried, find out the type and make of the child seats, and confirm that they are correct for your children and have not been involved in a crash. It remains important that you confirm that the vehicle you are using is designed to carry these child seats, and that these child seats are fitted correctly and that children are buckled up correctly in them, in line with the seats' manufacturer's instructions. This means that if you are fitting the child seats or seating the children yourself you will need access to these instructions.

### **Tips when using parents' own child seats**

- Ensure children's child seats are labelled by parents so they don't get muddled, with the instruction manuals also labelled if you are 'fitting and sitting' yourself.
- For children whose parents do not have a car and therefore do not have a car seat, you need a couple of extra, modern child seats to hand that are spare and appropriate for the height and weight of your children. You may also need spares in case parents forget.

### **If you are planning not using child seats for children under 150cm tall**

As stated above, as long as a vehicle is designed to take child seats it is recommended that they are used for children under 150cm tall, as long as the seats are fitted correctly and children are seated and buckled up correctly. Some adults organising trips for children face logistical difficulties in using child seats. If you can obtain the use of a modern vehicle that is designed to take child seats, Brake strongly recommends that you work to overcome these difficulties. It is invariably worth overcoming these difficulties in the interests of child safety. However, if, against the advice in this guidance, you are not using child seats it is very important that you belt up children using the fitted 3-point belts. To repeat advice earlier given, using a vehicle with lap belts alone is wholly inadequate for these small, young children, and it is usually possible to hire a vehicle with 3-point belts. It is important, if only using 3-point belts, to place, and keep, the lap section across the hard, pelvic area and NOT the stomach of the child, and the diagonal section across their shoulder and NOT their neck. You may find this very hard to achieve because the children are so small - bear this in mind when considering whether to undertake this option rather than use child seats. Some vehicles are fitted with all-generation 3-point belts, where the diagonal section can be lowered so that it fits across a child's shoulder rather than their neck.

#### **WARNING:**

- Never put a seat belt around an adult and child on your lap; in an impact, your weight would crush the child.
- Never just hold a child - you can't hold onto them in a crash.

For children who are 150cm or taller, who can travel just using 3-point seat belts, it is important that the lap section of the belt goes across the hard, pelvic area and NOT the stomach, and the diagonal section goes across the shoulder and NOT their neck. Accompanying adults should ensure children keep their belts on and correctly positioned during the whole duration of the trip. With these older children, it is sensible to provide them with a briefing, immediately before your trip, about the importance of wearing seat belts correctly throughout the trip.

## General guidance on fitting child seats (not to replace formal training)

- Not all child seats fit all vehicles. Check with the manufacturer of the seat and the vehicle.
- Do not use a child seat that you do not know the history of; it may have been involved in a crash or damaged in some other way.

## Infant Carriers (Group 0 & 0+)

- Infant carriers must only be fitted facing the rear of a vehicle.
- Read the instructions, check seat belt is routed correctly.
- Ensure the seat belt webbing is pulled as tightly as possible with no slack, so there is no excessive movement.
- Keep children in rear facing seats as long as possible, this is the safest position. As a guide, they should only be moved up when their head reaches the top of the seat NOT because their legs look too long.
- Never use a rearward facing child seat on a passenger seat fitted with an airbag.

## Forward Facing Seat (Group 1)

- Read the instructions, check seat belt is routed correctly.
- Once fitted, kneel in the seat to pull any slack out of the seatbelt; check there is no movement by pulling the child seat harness.
- Ensure no part of the buckle rests on the frame of the seat as it could break on impact (buckle crunching).
- Do not move a child into this seat unless they can sit up unaided for a length of time.
- Shoulder straps should be level with child's shoulders and harness comfortable but firm (and not twisted), lying over child's pelvic area.
- Only move the child up to the next stage seat when the top of their head reaches above the top of the seat.
- It is recommended that all child seats are fitted into the back of cars.

## Forward Facing Seat /Booster (Group 2/3)

- Do not use this stage too soon as children are only restrained by the adult seat belt.
- Ensure the diagonal belt lies across the child's shoulder (not the neck) and the lap belt across the pelvic area (not the abdomen).
- If the seat has a back, use as long as possible until child reaches weight limit or becomes too tall, as it gives side protection.
- Check child's top of head is not above the seat back as this could lead to whiplash injuries

## Benefits of following this guidance

- Peace of mind that you are providing the best possible crash protection in the event of a crash.
- Best-possible comfort for the children, who invariably get fidgety on long journeys.
- High standard of compliance with risk assessment procedures within your institution.
- Opportunity to use the process as part of a learning exercise for the children on measuring and the importance of their special child seat or seat belts.
- Opportunity for a learning exercise for younger children on measuring and the importance of their car's special child seat.
- Helping children to be safer when out and about in vehicles with their parents or other relatives, as they will be more aware of the importance of seatbelts and child seats.
- Opportunity to update your internal health and safety policy to ensure you apply this standard on every trip.

- Evidence that you can use when you apply for your Healthy School status, or on your website when you are explaining what a safe and responsible institution you are.

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