Car Seats for Children with Special Needs
by Susan Agrawal

Many children with special needs require a specialized car seat due to positioning issues, problems with muscle tone, cognitive or developmental issues, and other issues. This article will present some of the most commonly available car seats for children with various special needs.

Children Under Two Years Old

Current recommendations are that children under the age of two ride rear facing in a car seat. Since these recommendations were released, car seat manufacturers have changed their convertible seats to allow children with higher weights and heights to remain in these car seats. Because these car seats are designed to hold children from birth to age two, they tend to provide enough support for most children with special needs. Therefore, most children under the age of two will not need a special car seat, and many of these children can continue to use certain regular car seats in a rear-facing position up until age three or four.

For an updated chart of height/weight requirements for all of the major brand car seats, see https://sites.google.com/site/carseatmeasurements/, a database compiled by the fine folks at car-seat.org.

Children Over Age Two in a Full Seat, Front Facing

If possible, children should continue to use their rear facing car seats as long as possible, and this is especially important for children with weak head and trunk muscles. Some children, however, need to move to a forward facing seat due to medical reasons, and eventually most children outgrow the height/weight requirements and need to move to a forward facing seat.

For some children with more mild disabilities, a standard convertible seat with a high front facing weight limit may be usable. Some of the more expensive seats, such as those made by Britax or Recaro, go up as high as 70-85 pounds front facing.
For children with more significant needs, a forward facing seat with extra positioning is required. The following are some of the full seats available for children with special needs. These all include a five-point harness, and all are forward facing only.

**Britax/Snug Seat Traveller**

![Britax/Snug Seat Traveller](image)

The Britax/Snug Seat Traveller is a large seat from a well-known and regarded company. It can be used forward facing up to 105 pounds. It includes special positioning pads for the head and sides, as well as an abductor. The seat can be reclined for children without head control. A seat extender is available. This seat is currently selling for about $650. [http://www.snugseat.com/en-US/Welcome-to-Snug-Seat.aspx](http://www.snugseat.com/en-US/Welcome-to-Snug-Seat.aspx)

**Columbia Medical Spirit**

![Columbia Medical Spirit](image)

This new seat from Columbia is the first car seat to offer wheelchair-style positioning, such as laterals, abductors, and hip supports. It is appropriate forward facing for children
with all levels of disability up to 130 pounds. A recline bar is included for use in children with head and trunk control issues. A seat extender is also available. It is selling for about $800, with an additional cost for each positioning item.

**Thomashilfen Recaro Sport Reha Car Seat**

This Thomashilfen seat is for children with moderate disabilities up to 80 pounds. It has a built-in headrest and positioning pads and is able to tilt in space for children who need head or trunk support or are sleeping. Other options include a footrest, table, turning plate for easier loading, and additional positioning supports. It is currently available for about $1200.

**Special Tomato MPS Car Seat**
This car seat, from the Special Tomato Multi-Positioning Seat (MPS) family, is best suited for children with mild to moderate needs. It is a forward facing seat that comes in two sizes that can be used up to 80 and 150 pounds respectively. There are two headrest options, and other positioning pads are adjustable. The seat can also be used outside a vehicle as a regular positioning chair, and can be used on an airplane. The small is currently selling for about $600, while the large is $900.
http://www.specialtomato.com/carseat.html

**Carrie Seat**

The Carrie Seat is an upright car seat for children with mild to moderate disabilities. It comes in four sizes, for children from 20 to 130 pounds. This seat can also be used outside of a vehicle as a positioning or push chair. Numerous add-ons are available. The Carrie Seat Elementary size is approved to be used on an aircraft. Prices range from $800-1000 depending on the size.
Columbia Medical TheraPedic Seat

This older model Columbia seat is appropriate for children with mild to moderate disabilities. It comes in two sizes, with a maximum user weight of 102 and 130 pounds respectively. Additional positioning pads, a stroller base, and a seat extender are also available. The smaller child-size seat is approved for use on aircraft. Prices for this seat range from $750 to $1300 depending on size, with positioning items extra.


The Roosevelt

The Roosevelt is a large seat for children up to 115 pounds, and is suitable for children with moderate disabilities. It includes a specialized EZ-Up Headrest, which uses a hat to hold the child’s head up within the seat. It has a built in adjustable headrest, a pommel,
and leg extensions available. It retails for about $900.
http://www.eztether.com/index.html

Children Over Age Four in a Booster Seat

Children should remain forward facing in a convertible or special needs car seat for as long as possible. Many of these seats can accommodate children up to 65-80 pounds, with even higher ranges for some special needs seats.

Children who have the physical ability to sit up may be able to use one of the newer conventional booster seats with five-point harnesses. These seats are often called harness to booster seats, and allow a convertible seat to be changed into a booster seat (removing the harness) as the child gets older. Many of these seats allow the five-point harness to be used up to very high weights, in some cases up to 90 pounds.

Children who continue to need a five-point harness or some extra support may be able to use one of the available special needs booster seats. All are secured with a regular car shoulder belt. These seats are listed below.

**Thomashilfen Recaro Monza Reha**

This Thomashilfen seat offers positioning assistance, including a five-point harness (for positioning only), positioning pads, and a headrest. It can be used up to 110 pounds. Unlike many other seats, this one has some extra bells and whistles, such as speakers in the headrest. Many accessories are also available, including a seat extender, tray, turning plate (to allow easier loading of a child), abductor, footrest, and other positioning items. This seat is currently selling for about $1000.
Snug Seat Pilot

This newer Snug Seat booster seat is designed for children up to 120 pounds. This booster can recline slightly, and is able to grow considerably with your child. It includes a four-point harness for positioning, as well as a headrest and built-in positioning pads. It is available for about $550. http://www.snugseat.com/en-US/Welcome-to-Snug-Seat.aspx

Reha Partner Recaro Start Plus

This seat, also from Recaro, is appropriate for children up to 80 pounds. It includes a five point harness for positioning, a reclining backrest, and grows with your child. Options include laterals, an abductor, tray, footrest, and a turning plate for easier loading. It is currently available for about $1350. http://www.reha-partner.de/
The Churchill booster uniquely combines a vest or chest wrap and an in-vehicle booster seat. It is designed for children 65 to 175 pounds. A headrest and pommel can be added on. It retails for about $900. http://www.eztether.com/index.html

Coming Soon: Carrot by Convaid

This new Carrot seat will be released this fall, and is currently in use in Europe. It is designed for children ages 3-15. It includes several interesting features, such as variable recline, seat extensions, and accessories such as a table and turning plate for easier access. Backrest and seat extensions can be added as needed as the child grows. A built in headrest, side impact protection, and a five-point harness are also included. It can be used on airplanes as well. A mini version is also available in other countries. http://www.convaid.com/carrot-child-restraint-system-p-1244-l-en.html
Specialized Items

There are a few other options available for children with unusual needs. These include:

- **Snug Seat Hippo**: Car seat for children with spica casts
- **AngelRide Infant Car Bed**: Car bed for infants who must lie down while riding
  http://www.angel-guard.com/product.html
- **Cosco Dream Ride Infant Car Bed**: Car bed for infants who must lie down while riding
- **Hope Care Bed**: Car bed for infants who must lie down while riding
- **E-Z-On Vest**: Two types of harnesses that can secure a child lying down in a vehicle or attached to mounting system in the vehicle
- **CARES Vest**: A harness for airline travel http://www.kidsflysafe.com/