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Car Seats for Children with Special Needs

Note: product info updated in 2019. There are several new items on the market that are not included below. They include:

- [R82 Wallaroo](#)
- [R82 Quokka](#)
- [Ride Safer Travel Vest](#)

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 [this list of car seat measurements and facts](#), 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



Note: This seat is no longer being made but remaining inventory may still be available for purchase. 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.

Spirit Plus, Spirit, and IPS Carseat



[This groups of seats](#), originally from Columbia but now sold through Drive, includes the first car seat to offer wheelchair-style positioning, such as laterals, abductors, and hip supports. The base model has no positioners; the Spirit Plus model includes a wide range of positioning items. They are 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. Accessories are also available. A simple model, the IPS Carseat, is for children up to 75 pounds. This range sells for about \$1000-\$4000.

Thomashilfen Reha Car Seats



These [Thomashilfen seats](#) are for children with moderate disabilities up to 80 pounds. Various models are available for both the US and Canadian markets. They have a built-in headrest and positioning pads and are 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. They are currently available for about \$1200.

Special Tomato MPS Car Seat



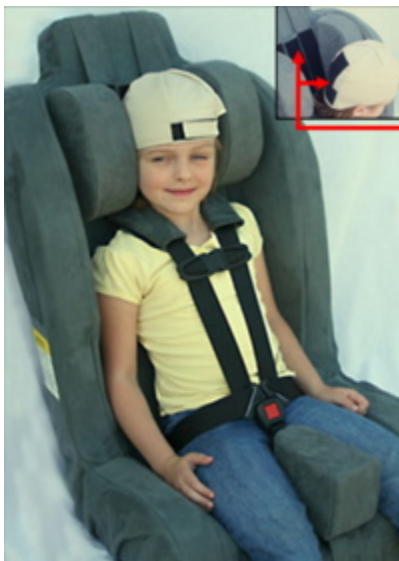
This car seat, from the [Special Tomato Multi-Positioning Seat \(MPS\) family](#), is best suited for children with mild to moderate needs. It is a forward facing seat that comes in two sizes that can be used up to 80 and 150 pounds respectively. There are two headrest options, and other positioning 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.

Carrie Seat



Note: this seat is no longer being marketed as a car 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.

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.

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 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.

R82 Pilot



This [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.

Reha Partner Recaro Start Plus



Note: this seat is no longer on the market. [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.

The Churchill and Chamberlain



The [Churchill booster](#) and [Chamberlain booster](#) uniquely combine a vest or chest wrap and an in-vehicle booster seat. They are designed for children 65 to 175 and 81-225 pounds, respectively. A headrest and pommel can be added on. It retails for about \$900.

Carrot by Convaid



The [Carrot seat](#) was released in 2011 in the US. There is also a [booster seat version](#). 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.

Specialized Items

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

include:

- [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
- [Jefferson Car Seat](#): Car seat for children with an omphalocele

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