

Car restraint systems can save lives

LANCASTER — In a 30 mile per hour crash, a child can be thrown forward by a force equal to 30 times his weight. If the child isn't secured to the seat, the result is tragic, says Dennis J. Murphy, Extension safety specialist at The Pennsylvania State University.

In 1980, 1500 children under the age of five were killed in auto

accidents and thousands were injured according to National Safety Council figures.

"Many of those deaths and injuries could have been prevented if the parents had secured the child with a restraint system," Murphy says. "After all, a recent survey found that only 5 percent of young children were protected with child

restraints."

One of the most important rules, Murphy stresses, is that all children under the age of 5, or weighing less than 40 pounds, should ride in a child restraint.

There are several types of restraint systems, that are designed according to the age of the child. For the infant, from birth

to about 9 to 12 months old, there is the infant carrier.

This system consists of a safety seat in which the baby faces toward the car's back seat in a semi-reclining position. In an accident, shock is absorbed on the baby's back, rather than the more fragile chest and abdomen. The infant carrier is padded, has belts to secure the child, and is anchored to the car by the vehicle's safety belt.

"In a car, the baby should travel in an infant seat from day one," Murphy says. "That means expectant parents should acquire a baby seat ahead of time for that first trip from the hospital to home."

Babies should ride in an infant seat until they can sit up by themselves - without support, usually around the age of 9 to 12 months. At this point, the baby is ready for the child safety seat, where he can sit up straight.

The child safety seat also can be used for toddlers, ages 1 to 4. In a child safety seat, the toddler faces forward and is secured with the auto's safety belt, as well as a five-point safety harness. A tether strap helps hold the seat to the auto.

Two other types of restraint systems for the toddler are the protective shield, and the child

harness system. The protective shield is a C-shaped shell that the child slips into. The shield is anchored to the car by the seat belt.

In an accident, the child is cushioned by the shield. Advantages of a shield are that the child does not have to be secured with a harness, and the shield doesn't have to be connected to the car with a tether strap.

But there are disadvantages, Murphy warns. The shield doesn't provide as much protection in a collision from the side. Also, the child can slip in and out of the shield easier than a harness system; so the child must be watched more closely.

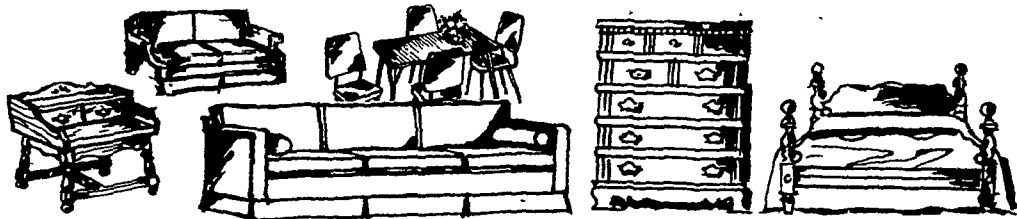
The child harness system does not provide good protection in a side collision; that's why it should be used with the child placed in the center of the back seat.

In a child harness system, there is no special seat for the child. The system consists of a five-point harness that is anchored by both the car's seat belt and a tether strap.

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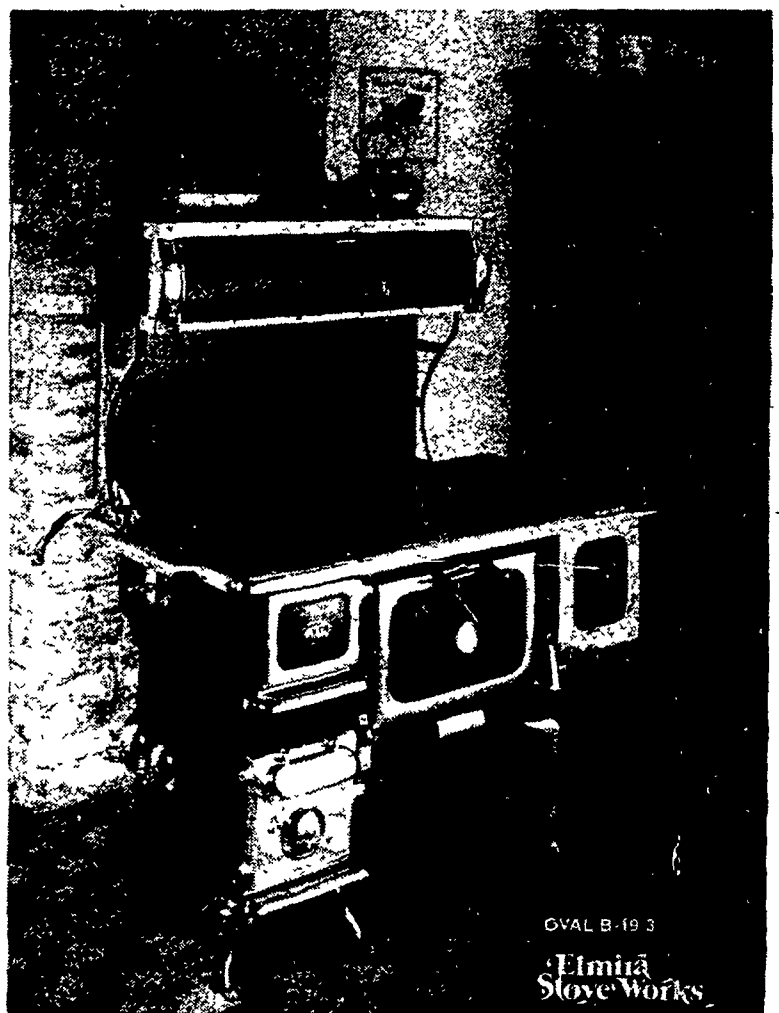
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