

The Station Wagon Generation

For the station wagon generation, it's with sympathy that we straightjacket children in armored pods. We ply them with iPads to makeup for this forced imprisonment, and we stop at McDonalds playgrounds every two hours.

Gone are the days of wood paneled station wagons with a mattress thrown in the rear for kids to romp around on long trips. Back then, children hanging off the back of pickup trucks was nothing to scoff at, and an elbow rest used as a booster seat was good nurturing. When riding shotgun with mom, her quick hand on the chest seemed all the seat belt a boy or girl could ever need.

Car safety began to change in the 1980s when safety experts began analyzing data. New York was the first state to pass a law which required vehicle occupants to wear seat belts, a law that came into effect on December 1, 1984, but that law didn't apply in the backseat. (The thinking went that seats would cushion the impact for riders in the back.) Tennessee was the first state to pass a car seat law, and between 1978-1985, all states passed car seat laws. By 1984, 50% of kids 0-4 were in car seats. The United States has an interesting [car seat history](#), including putting kids in bags.

The station wagon days gave us great freedom because there was little statistical data and government initiatives to tell us we were doing it wrong. Backseats were playpens and front seats were for driving. The boundaries were breached when children demonstrated an aptitude for sitting patiently and attentively, promoted to the front seat as reward for good behavior. Today, kids are banished to car seat restraints until the age of 8 [in most states](#). While nobody can argue that lives have been saved because of children's car seats, we also know that the quality of our lives has deteriorated because of them. Trips are longer and kids feel more trapped.