

Ten Steps to Help Your Child Cycle Safely

For children, cycling means freedom and adventure. When children learn good cycling habits early, they can stay safe. As a parent or caregiver, you have an important role to play in helping your child learn good cycling habits. You can help:

- (1) be a good role model;**
- (2) make sure your child has safe equipment;**
- (3) have clear rules; and**
- (4) discuss good cycling habits with your children.**

The information below offers key aspects of cycling to discuss with your children. The best thing you can do is be involved in your children's cycling.

#1 If the bicycle fits...

Make sure your child is riding a bike that fits and is in good working order. A bike that is too big can't be controlled properly and can be dangerous. It is not safe to buy a big bike with the idea that your child will "grow into" it. A child should have both feet on the ground when straddling the top tube of the bike. The child should be able to touch the ground with the toes of both feet while sitting on the seat without leaning the bike.

Make sure that the wheels are on tight and that the brakes work. A bell or horn is required by law, and so is a red rear reflector and front white light if you ride at night.

#2 Don't forget your helmet...

Wearing a bike helmet can save you and your child from serious injury or death. Wearing a bike helmet reduces the risk of brain injury. Your children may never have a collision with a car, but they will probably fall off their bikes sometime. Even at low speeds, if the head hits the ground, brain damage can occur. A helmet can cost as little as \$15.

Make sure the helmet fits and the straps stay adjusted. The helmet should sit level on the head. Keep the chin strap fastened whenever the helmet is in use.

#3 Children under 9 need supervision...

Children learn new skills as they grow. Before age nine, most children do not have the skills to cycle safely on the road. Learning to balance a bike is only the first step. Understanding how traffic works takes time and experience. Before age nine, children need help to make good choices. Children under nine should ride with responsible adults.

#4 Rules of the road are for cyclists...

The bicycle is a vehicle. Regardless of age, a cyclist must obey the rules of the road and all the traffic signs. Stop at all stop signs and red lights. Ride on the right hand side of the road.

#5 Driveways may be hazardous to your health...

Many children are hurt and some are killed every year because they ride into the street without looking. They get hit by a car that has no chance of stopping in time. A driveway is an intersection. Teach your children: (1) stop before entering the road; (2) look left, ahead, right, then left again; and (3) if there is no traffic, then go.

#6 Practice makes perfect when crossing the street...

Children need help to understand when it's safe to cross the road. Crossing the road can mean crossing at the corner, crossing at a sidewalk, or crossing in the middle of the block. The same rules apply when crossing railway tracks. Children should walk their bikes across the street and across tracks. They should learn to check left, check ahead, check right, then left again before deciding if it is safe to cross. They should not ride across tracks because they will have too many things to think when checking to make sure it is safe. Children younger than seven should not cross any street alone. Children younger than nine should not cross busy streets alone. You must walk your bike when crossing the street at a crosswalk.

#7 Sidewalks are not always safe...

For young cyclists, sidewalks may be the best place to ride. But sidewalks are not always safe. Children need help from their parents to stay safe when they ride on the sidewalk.

There are driveways and alleys that cross the sidewalk. Drivers may not see a young cyclist riding on the sidewalk. Driveways, alleys, and even doorways, should be considered as intersections.

Sidewalks may be bumpy, causing children to lose control of their bikes and fall. Pedestrians have the right of way and do not expect cyclists to be there, too. Pets can run in front of bikes. At the end of the block, the sidewalk ends and the road begins.

Be with your children when they ride on the sidewalk. Help them to stop to check possible danger spots. Help children respect pedestrians on the sidewalk.

When children have developed the necessary skills (age nine and up), the safest place to ride in the neighbourhood is on the road, where other drivers can see them.

#8 Children should learn to make their own decisions...

If a child is cycling with friends, he or she may just follow the cyclist in front. This is dangerous. Traffic is changing all the time. Breaking the law, such as riding through a stop sign, is still wrong, even if a friend did it first. Help children learn that they are responsible for their own vehicles and must make good and safe decisions for themselves.

#9 Never make a turn without looking behind first...

When cyclists are riding on the road or on a bike trail, they must always look back over their shoulder first before signalling and turning. Children may have been taught their signals, but they usually do not know how to make a shoulder check. It can be a lifesaver. Cyclists must check to see if the way is clear before changing direction. If there is traffic, a child should stop by the side of the road and wait for a gap before turning.

#10 Enroll yourself and your children in safe cycling skills courses...

Cyclists who take one of the Canadian Cycling Association's CAN-BIKE courses for children or adults reduce their chances of being involved in a crash or collision and gain confidence about cycling more often and in more situations. Call your provincial cycling association for more information.

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