

Characteristics of young cyclists

Grades 3 - 5

(Ages 8 - 10)

By the time they have reached eight or nine years old, students are more likely to be cycling than not. Many will be riding to school. Their strength is increasing as they grow and, by now, they are riding much faster and farther from home than children in earlier grades. However, they still lack the physical coordination to always be in full control of their bikes. Combined with their fearless outlook, their riding style leads others to describe their behaviour as "reckless". Boys are especially likely to be involved in falls and crashes.

Children in higher grades generally have geared bikes, ride longer distances on roads with more traffic and have a greater understanding of traffic rules than their younger counterparts. However, many do not apply these rules when cycling and are uncertain how to properly interact with pedestrians and motor vehicles.

Cyclists between the ages of 8 and 14 have the highest proportion of bicycle-related injuries. However, students have developed sufficiently to begin benefiting from on-road instruction in small groups.

The following characteristics are common to boys and girls in grades 3 through 5.

Outlook

- C Fearless:* Many children have not developed an understanding of danger (see grades K - 2).
- C Easily distracted:* Children can focus on only one thing at a time. If they are distracted while riding, they may turn unexpectedly, often in front of traffic (see grades K - 2).
- C Narrow field of vision:* Children have about only two-thirds of the peripheral vision of adults (see grades K - 2).
- C Adventuresome:* Students are exploring more of the world around them, going more places and doing more things. They may take greater risks in their attempts to try new things.
- C Peer pressure:* Students begin developing peer consciousness around age 10. They try to avoid doing things that will not be accepted by their peers. These students tend to adopt the cycling practices of those around them.

Ⓒ *Confidence*: Many youth overestimate their abilities to handle traffic situations.

Physical development

Ⓒ *Small size reduces visibility*: see grades K - 2.

Ⓒ *Increased strength*: Stronger riders ride faster. These cyclists' greater speed makes them unpredictable to other road users and enables them to ride into hazardous situations (such as darting in front of cars) at the blink of an eye.

Ⓒ *Coordination*: Older students' increased coordination makes them able to handle their bikes safely on busier roads, but it also may lead to bad habits such as "hotdogging", riding with no hands, or dodging onto sidewalks.

Crashes and Injuries

Ⓒ *Falls*: Students encounter more road hazards as they explore more territory. If they are travelling quickly, as many youth tend to do, these hazards can result in serious falls. Falling is the leading cause of cycling injuries (also, see grades K - 2).

Ⓒ *Intersections*: Unlike younger students, these riders are more likely to ride on all available roads. They are more likely than younger students to encounter traffic lights. More than half of all collisions happen at intersections. For pre-teens, this is usually a result of ignoring or not understanding the rules of the road or not paying attention while riding.

Ⓒ *Driveway and mid-block rideout*: Leaving driveways, parking lots and sidewalks without watching for traffic is the most frequent cause of car-bike collisions involving children (see grades K - 2).

Ⓒ *Wrong-way riding*: Riding on the left, facing traffic, is a leading cause of car-bike collisions no matter what the cyclist's age.

Ⓒ *Sidewalk riding*: Sidewalk riding results in more injuries than riding on the road (see grades K - 2).

Ⓒ *Unexpected left turns*: Young cyclists turn or swerve without warning into the paths of overtaking cars or cars approaching from the opposite direction. A similar situation is created when wrong-way cyclists turn or swerve to the right into oncoming traffic.

Ⓒ *Stopping:* By the time they have reached this age, most children ride bikes with handbrakes. Falls and collisions resulting from incorrect application of the brakes become more common in this age group.

How this resource complements Saskatchewan's Health Education Curriculum

Grade 3 theme is "Getting the Facts".

Grade 4 theme is "Making Decisions".

Grade 5 theme is "Checking Expectations".

Use these themes to provide focus for lessons (see Key Concepts chart at the beginning of this manual).

For example, in presenting the concept of the "rules of the road", you could let grade 3 students explore concrete application of the rules (e.g. ride one metre from the curb and parked cars). Grade 4 students can use their earlier cycling knowledge to explore the right of way decisions cyclists make on their way to school or through town. Grade 5 students can apply the concepts of the rules of the road, cooperation and responsibility in the context of their parents', peers' and other drivers' expectations of them.

Combine classroom instruction with on-bike (controlled riding environment) and on-road (in-traffic) experience. CAN-BIKE Smart Cycling parking lot drills can be used effectively up to age nine. CAN-BIKE Cycle Right includes classroom, controlled-environment and in-traffic instruction suitable for older students. A well-organized bike rodeo provides practice in a controlled environment.

Instructional Tactics

Use techniques that respond to the outlook of these students:

- Ⓒ Encourage students to follow safe practices early in life, before they can develop poor cycling habits.
- Ⓒ Combine students from two or more grades, to minimize effects of peer pressure and to develop more responsible attitudes about cycling.
- Ⓒ Practice, review and reinforcement can ensure that confidence is tempered by improved skill and give students a more accurate assessment of their abilities.
- Ⓒ Also, see grades K - 2.

Compensate for the effects of their physical development:

- Ⓒ Get students to wear bright clothes and (safely) decorate their bicycles and helmets in bright colours.
- Ⓒ Encourage children to ride where they can be seen on the road (lane and destination positioning).
- Ⓒ Emphasize predictable behaviour and following the rules of the road (bicycle as a vehicle).
- Ⓒ Practice bike handling skills (see Cycle Right pp. 9 - 10).
- Ⓒ Also, see grades K - 2.

Emphasize behaviours that reduce risk of injury:

- Ⓒ Encourage students to wear helmets and to wear them correctly.
- Ⓒ Experienced cyclists have fewer falls. Practice on-bike handling skills. Make sure students' bikes are in proper working order (refer to the bicycle safety checklist) and practice proper braking procedures.
- Ⓒ Practice handling skills that improve safety in traffic. Ensure that students are shoulder checking and signalling whenever they approach an intersection, turn or change their position on the roadway. Practice search and scan techniques.
- Ⓒ By the time they are eight years old, cyclists should be instructed to ride on the road (not on the sidewalk).
- Ⓒ Once cyclists are old enough to be riding on the road, they must follow the rules of the road. Teach students to always ride on the right. Ensure students practice proper procedures for passing motor vehicles on the right and at intersections.
- Ⓒ Have students practice destination positioning (it will make them more predictable and visible at intersections).
- Ⓒ Encourage students to ride during daylight hours only.

Sustain their interest:

- Ⓒ Structure a lesson so that students can follow step by step. To teach bicycle safety, a convenient method is to present the sequence of steps involved in going for a ride. Make it into a story, if you prefer.
- Ⓒ Encourage students to discuss their own experiences.
- Ⓒ Use visual aids and props - your bike, overheads, videos, clothing and helmet samples.
- Ⓒ If enlisting the help of assistant instructors who are not known to the class, have students wear name tags.