



How to Keep Your Young Cyclist Safe

Written by Administrator

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Once a child has fully mastered the art of riding a tricycle or a bike with training wheels, it may be time to introduce a new bicycle. However, before you rush out and purchase your child's first "two-wheeler," it's important to sit down with your son or daughter and carefully explain your family's safety rules. You may want to start out by referring to the two sets of safety guidelines set forth below.

Basic Safety Rules First

- Inform your children that they must start by: (1) only riding during the day, (2) with a family adult riding with them (3) on designated sidewalks or along special bike lanes or trails. Explain how a rider goes about checking on local city ordinances that govern where adults and children may ride their bicycles. Tell you children that some cities restrict where people can ride their bicycles on sidewalks in order to fully protect pedestrians.
- Riding on sidewalks. Once your child is allowed to ride her bicycle alone on sidewalks, explain how dangerous it can be to ride across driveways and openings to alleyways, whether moving vehicle are visible or not. Drivers can suddenly turn into one of these from the street (or back out of one) without providing anyone with sufficient notice. Tell your kids to always get off their bikes and walk alongside of them before passing by any alleyway. If they're uncertain what a car in a driveway is about to do, they should also jump off their bicycles and wait to see what's going to happen -- while always keeping one eye on street vehicles that might suddenly turn into the driveway. Use the training period with your child to point out all of the possible dangers you think they

may encounter later when alone. Of course, it's best to keep a balance and remind them how much fun they'll have once they learn to ride safely;

- Proper gear and bicycles. Choose a rather simple model for your child's first bicycle to minimize the length of their learning curve. Take your child with you when you purchase the bicycle so you can have its seat adjusted to a proper height, one that allows your child to quickly dismount or balance on both feet while waiting for a light to change or a danger to pass by. While there, you should also purchase a bicycle helmet made with polystyrene foam – with a label indicating it meets with U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines. Next, consider buying protective knee and elbow pads. If the store carries riding gloves that fit your child's hands, you might want to purchase those as well. Finally, you may want to buy some bright clothing and bicycle markers to make sure your child and his bike are readily visible to drivers out on the road.

Additional, Quick Safety Tips for Avoiding Injuries

Children must also be given the following warnings:

- They should always walk their bikes across all busy intersections, whether a street light governs their actions or not;
- A rider should never allow another child to balance on his handlebars or other bike parts since this can greatly endanger both children;
- They should always avoid riding on busy streets;
- Kids should consider leaving their bicycles at home on rainy days since slippery roads make it too easy to fall or lose control of a bicycle;
- Children should always ride in the same direction as the traffic near them, carefully obeying all street and road signs;
- Riders should make sure that their helmets fit snugly enough to provide good protection. Most neighborhood bike shop employees can provide excellent advice on obtaining a proper fit. Remind your children that up to 85% of bicycle head injuries can be prevented (or their severity lessened) by wearing a helmet;
- People should never wear any headphones or music earplugs while riding bicycles since they may fail to hear street sounds that could save their lives;

- No bicyclist should ever use a cell phone while riding a bike; pull off the road or to the edge of the sidewalk before placing or receiving any calls;
- Make sure your tires, brakes and gears are in perfect working condition every 90 days or so, depending on how much you ride your bicycle;
- Don't take improper advantage of being on a bicycle – make full, complete stops where cars and other vehicles must also make them;
- Drive defensively, always looking to see what other cyclists and cars are about to do that may impact your safety;
- Never use a bike to perform stunts or tricks for friends – this type of careless behavior often leads to serious injuries; and
- Always carry a small first aid kit to help with injuries. After an older child has been riding a while, she may want to take a bicycle maintenance class so she can start carrying spare parts along on rides and making minor repairs before heading home.

We hope this general review of bicycle safety tips will help you keep your children free from any future harm.

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