

Hints for Parents

Children need a lot of training and practice to learn how to ride safely. The best way to teach your children safe bicycling skills is to ride with them. Let them lead sometimes, so they get used to making decisions on their own. Remember, children learn by watching others, so be sure that you always ride (and drive) responsibly and wear a helmet. You can teach them a lot even if you don't ride.

Sidewalks are preferred by many young bicyclists, and their parents. Sidewalks, however, present a host of hazards to bicyclists. If your children ride on sidewalks, teach them to be cautious when riding past shrubs, fences and buildings that create blind spots at driveways and intersections for both bicyclists and motorists. Many bicyclists are hit when entering a crosswalk from a driver's right side. Often, the driver was stopped at a stop sign and looking left for a gap in traffic, not to their right for a bicyclist or pedestrian on the sidewalk. Teach your children not to enter the intersection unless waved on by the driver, and to look for other traffic that might turn across their path first. And, of course, pedestrians always have the right of way on sidewalks and in crosswalks.

Entering the street from a driveway, children often fail to stop first and look for traffic. They do not understand that traffic on the street has the right of way over those entering the street. Teach them to always stop before entering the street, and to look left, right and left again for traffic to be sure it is safe to enter the street. Children have limited peripheral vision, so emphasize that they have turn their heads when looking for traffic.

Wrong way riding is a major contributing cause of bicycle crashes for children. All bicyclists should ride on the right side of the street, in the same direction as other traffic.

The sudden swerve: Children often make left turns, or swerve left around parked cars or other hazards, without looking behind them first to see if there are cars close behind them. Teach your children to do this by having them ride a straight line and look over their left shoulder when you call out their name. When they look back, they should shout out how many fingers you are holding up.

Bike too big: Some parents buy bicycles like clothes, so their children can grow into them. On a properly sized bicycle, your child should be able to stand over the top bar with his/her feet flat on the ground and an inch or two of clearance over the bar. They should be able to reach and squeeze the brake levers comfortably when seated on the bicycle. A child who cannot reach the ground or the brake levers will be less likely to stop when required, and the bicycle will be harder to control in general.

Equipment malfunction: Children are tough on bicycles, so they should be inspected frequently. Take your child's bicycle to a bike shop and have them show you and your child how to check their bicycle to make sure it works properly. See the "Two Minute Bike Check" elsewhere on this web site.

For more information on safe bicycling for children, check out a copy of the video *A Kid's Eye View* from the library.