

Teaching Children Bicycle Safety

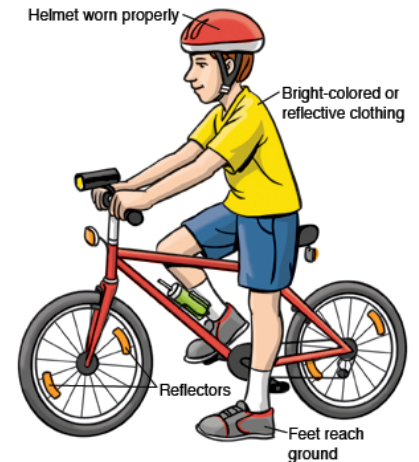
Your child rides a bicycle—that's great! Bike riding is fun, it's good exercise, and it can give your child a sense of independence. But a bike is a vehicle, not a toy. So you and your child need to know how to ride safely. Three important things you can do to keep your child safe are:

- **Have your child wear a helmet every time he or she rides a bike—no exceptions.**
- **Teach your child the rules of the road to keep him or her safe while riding on the street.**
- **Make sure your child's bike is kept in good working order.**

Read on for more details about bike safety and children.

Tips for Bicycle Safety

- Make sure your child has the right equipment.
 - Have your child wear a helmet every time he or she rides a bike (see box below).
 - Make sure the bike is the correct size for the child. A bike that's too big makes injuries more likely.
 - The child's feet should reach the ground when he or she is seated.
 - The bike should fit your child at his or her current age. The child shouldn't "grow into it."
 - Make sure the type of bike matches your child's abilities. For instance, gears and shifting can be confusing for a young child. Start your child with a one-speed and work up.
- Keep the bicycle in good repair. Inspect it often. Things to check include the brakes, the tire pressure, and the tightness of the chain.
- Make sure your child can be seen easily.
 - Dress your child in bright-colored or reflective clothing.
 - Don't allow your child to ride when it's dark. And if your child must ride at dawn or dusk, make sure he or she uses reflectors and lights.
- Teach your child safe control of the bicycle.
 - Both hands should be kept on the bike's handlebars.
 - Books and other items should be carried in a backpack or a basket attached to the bike.
 - Only one person should ride a bike at a time—no exceptions.
- Make sure your child never wears headphones while riding.
 - Your child needs to be able to hear oncoming traffic.
 - If the equipment falls out of your child's ears, it could get tangled in the bike's wheels, causing an accident.
- Make sure your child wears the right clothing.
 - Your child should wear sturdy, closed-toe shoes. No flip-flops or bare feet.
 - Loose-fitting clothing should be avoided. It could get caught in tire spokes.



Check for these things to help keep your child safe while riding a bike. Also, be sure to keep the bike well maintained.

The Rules of the Road

Learning safety early can help ensure a lifetime of safe bicycle riding. Before your child starts riding, be sure to teach him or her the rules of riding, including:

- Bike riders should know how to use hand signals. These are used to let car drivers know what a bicyclist plans to do. Hand signals include:
 - Left turn: Left arm extended straight out
 - Right turn: Left arm bent up at the elbow, or right arm extended straight out
 - Stopping: Left arm bent down at the elbow
- As a rule, children under 10 years old should ride on the sidewalk, not on the road (even in the bike lane). Use your best judgment about whether your child is ready to ride on the road. Make sure he or she can demonstrate the skill and knowledge needed to keep safe.
- Before pulling into the street at an intersection, a bike rider should always:
 - Stop, look left, look right, and look left again.
 - Look back and yield to any traffic coming from behind.
- Bike riders should always watch for cars coming out of driveways, parking spaces, and parking lots.
- Bikes should always be ridden in the direction of traffic, never against it. They should also be ridden on the right side of the road.
- Bike riders should understand and obey all street signs, traffic lights, and crossing signals.
- Young children should always walk bikes through intersections.
- A bike rider should always assume that a driver can't see him or her unless the driver makes eye contact.

Help Your Child Learn

- Model good behavior. For instance, when riding a bike, make sure you stop fully at all stop signs. This teaches your child that “rolling” through stop signs is not acceptable.
- Have older siblings act as role models for younger ones. This “peer-to-peer” guidance can be helpful.
- Be firm. Let your child know that the rules must be followed, or else he or she doesn't ride.
- Some kids, especially tweens (kids between 10 and 12 years old), think it's “uncool” to wear a helmet. Let them know they can't ride a bike without wearing a helmet.
- Look for local bicycle education classes that teach kids proper riding and traffic skills. Check out www.safekids.org or www.bikeleague.org for more information.

Bicycle Helmets

One of the biggest risks from bicycle incidents is permanent brain injury. Wearing a helmet the right way greatly lessens your child's chances of having a brain injury. Be sure to do the following:

- Start your child wearing a helmet at an early age. Introduce the helmet when your child starts riding a tricycle.
- Make sure the helmet is appropriate for the size and/or age of your child, and fits well. It should be level on top of the head, about two finger-widths above the eyebrows. It should not rock back and forth or side to side. The strap should be buckled and snug under the chin. For more information on helmet fit, visit www.nhtsa.gov and search for “bicycle helmet fit.”
- If you can, take the child to the store to try on the helmet before you buy it. This helps you find one that fits well. It's also helpful because a child who chooses his or her own helmet may be more likely to wear it. If you can't bring your child to the store, measure his or her head before going to the store.
- Make sure there is a CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) sticker on the helmet. This means the helmet meets the CPSC standard for safety.
- Don't use a helmet that has been in a crash. Discard it and buy a new one. A damaged helmet may not protect the head.
- **Set a good example—wear a helmet yourself!**