



Strategies to Teach Your Child to Ride a Bike

Learning to ride a bike is a common milestone of childhood. Yet it can be scary for children and parents alike about how to take those first steps to learn.

Safety should always be the first priority:

- Helmets should always be worn and fit appropriately.
- Keep shoe laces and pant legs away from spokes and gears.
- Wear reflective clothing.
- Gloves, elbow and knee pads will protect skin when first learning.

Before a child can successfully pedal and steer a bike, though, they must be able to balance and control the bike. Biking education specialists recommend teaching balance, pedaling and steering separately, and in sequence, to allow for better learning. Practice each phase, offering encouragement and praise. Move on to the next step when your child is confident.

To learn to balance and keep the bike upright:

- First, remove the training wheels and lower the seat to allow the rider to sit on the seat with feet flat on the ground.
- You may also remove the pedals, as this phase will only focus on pushing off the ground and gliding or coasting.
- Find a grassy area with a slight slope and have your child use his/her feet to push on the ground and glide the bike forward. Do not hold onto the bike. Your child is learning to balance the bike independently and should put his/her feet down to control the bike as needed.
- Encourage your child to push harder and raise his/her feet to glide.
- Encourage your child to glide longer distances. Keep the feet and legs close to the bike to prevent swerving.
- When your child is gliding or coasting with confidence, and keeping his/her head up, move to the next step.
- If they are starting to lean/fall in one direction, have them steer towards the direction they are leaning (counter steering) and this should straighten them out.
- Try games: Count to 10 to see if he/she can balance and gradually increase the time as he/she is successful. Try signing the ABCs while he/she is balancing.

To learn to pedal:

- If the pedals were removed, reattach them to the bike.
- Have your child start with one foot on the pedal and the other pushing off the ground then glide or coast as far as possible just keeping the foot on the pedal.
- Next have your child push off and put both feet on the pedals while gliding. Encourage him/her to glide as far as possible before putting feet on the ground.
- Introduce pedaling by encouraging your child to start pushing on the pedals while gliding. The seat should still be low enough to allow your child to quickly place his/her feet on the ground for support when needed.



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To learn to steer:

During this phase, your child will be putting all of the pieces together to start riding. Move from the grassy area to a flat area such as a parking lot, or a quiet neighborhood.

- Have your child start from a standstill by positioning one pedal at 2:00 for righties and 10:00 for lefties. This is called the power position and provides a more stable position from which to start pedaling. Have your child push from the power position with one foot and bring the other up to the second pedal and go!
- Encourage your child to keep his/her head up and look ahead. This will assist with going straight.
- Begin practicing to use the pedals or the hand grip to stop the bike.
- Begin practicing to turn by starting with slow, wide turns.

Tips for teaching children to ride a bike:

- Start when the child is interested in learning to ride a bike
- Always use safety measures
- Take breaks when getting too frustrated - this may take more than one day to master
- Keep it fun and positive
- Add games to teach skills

Games to teach bike riding skills:

- Set up cones to ride around
- Place cracker on the ground to encourage rolling over in glide or pedaling phase
- Place cracker on the ground to avoid during the steering phase
- Practice stopping just before rolling over the cracker
- Draw a curvy path with sidewalk chalk to be followed
- Play "Red Light, Green Light" to practice quick stopping and starting from a standstill

As your child masters these skills and gains confidence, the seat can be raised to its correct height. When sitting on the seat, the rider's leg should have a very slight bend at the knee (about 80-90% straight) and toes touching the ground.

References:

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