

Bicycling with kids



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What Parents Should Know

The first bicycle safety education children receive will be from their parents and other adults. Here are some things to keep in mind when educating children about bicycle safety within the roadway:

- Young children lack well-developed peripheral vision
- Children often have trouble determining the source of a sound; they may hear a car coming, but look the wrong way
- Until about eight years of age, children typically lack a sense of danger and they don't really understand how vulnerable they are
- Children have trouble evaluating cause and effect and dangerous situations
- Children have trouble judging the speed and distance of oncoming vehicles
- Children are often restless and eager to go; it's hard for them to stop and wait for traffic
- Children focus on things that are most interesting to them; an ice cream truck may take their attention from another approaching vehicle
- Children often mix fantasy with reality; they may see cars as friendly creatures or think they can ride faster than a car
- Children often believe grown-ups will look out for them; they may think that because they can see the car, the motorist can see them
- Children are very vulnerable to peer pressure and follow the lead of their friends; many crashes happen when one child takes a risk and a second follows and is hit by a vehicle

When is a Child Ready to Ride on the Street?

The most effective and fun way to teach your children safe bicycle riding habits is to ride with them. At first, let them follow you as in "Follow the Leader." As they become more able, let them lead while you observe and instruct. In general, a child may be ready to ride on the street when they can demonstrate the necessary cycling skills, alertness to traffic, and appropriate decision making skills. Until that time, bicycling should be limited to sidewalks, parks, and bike paths.

When training your child, give special attention to children's high-risk behaviors.

Make sure they:

1. Ride on the right in the same direction as traffic.
2. Stop before riding out of the driveway into the street. Help your child understand that entering the roadway from your driveway can be dangerous.
3. Stop at all stop signs and red traffic lights.
4. Ride predictably, ride in a straight line, and signal all turning movements. Teach children to use hand signals and look to the rear before turning.