

How do I teach my child to ride a bike?

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Learning to ride a bike is a rite of passage for children, and parents often play an important part in helping their children to start cycling and building their cycling confidence. This factsheet sets out the steps to get your children cycling from not having been on a bike before to getting your children cycling safely on the road.

## Before you start

As a parent or carer, before training a child to cycle, you must ensure that you have a bike that is the right size for the child, and that your child has a bike helmet that fits their head.

Cycling requires a child to be able to balance as well as well control pedals, and it is recommended that a child acquire one skill rather than trying to acquire both coordination and balance at the same time. There are two different methods that can work, training using a Balance Bike - which has no pedals and is propelled by children pushing against the ground with their feet, or training by using stabilisers - which are additional stabilising wheels attached to the frame, supporting the back tyre. Both methods help build confidence in cycling and allow focus on building confidence, while ensuring a safer experience for learner cyclists. Once the child has mastered the Balance Bike or can cycle confidently with stabilisers they are probably ready to move onto a pedal bike. Remember the goal for training is to teach your child how to balance, steer, brake and pedal with confidence.

Make sure that you have found a location where you can practise and train the child to ride their bike. The following should be considered:

- Choose a quiet, traffic-free spot such as a cycle path or a smooth pavement, or somewhere with short grass or smooth pavement. In a park is an ideal spot.
- Slightly sloping ground helps a bike move without requiring a child to scoot along with their feet.
- Be aware of hazards such as other paths users, ball games or dogs, and make sure that you are away from them when training, where possible.

## Which technique should I use to teach my child to ride a bike?

There are three main techniques you can follow in teaching your child to ride a bike; the 'No Pedals' method, The 'Towel/blanket' method and the 'Grassy hill' method, all of which are outlined below:

### No pedals method

It is possible to start this method at a very young age. The child first learns balance and steering on a balance bike or bike without pedals. After that, you can add pedals to the bike so that they can pedal and brake.

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### Get the bike ready

- Remove the bike pedals (you may need a pedal wrench or a 15mm open spanner) and stabilisers (if there are any installed). The other option is to use a Balance Bike for this step.
- Ensure that your child's feet are flat on the ground when seated.

### It's time to learn to coast without pedals

- Start by letting your child scoot around on the bike, using their feet, until they are comfortable with basic balance.
- Ask the child to take a few steps to get their bike moving, then get them to take longer strides or lift their feet off of the ground for longer, and coast along. You can demonstrate this by showing how to do this on your own bike, stretching your legs out to the sides or doing hops or small leaps.
- Play a game, seeing how long the child can coast without touching the ground. Do this a number of times, until the child can circle around the area confidently.

### Turning while coasting on the bike

- At this stage, it is time to coast and include big wide turns.
- In a square, place four flat objects about 20'/6m from each other.
- Encourage the child to scoot toward the square and make a big wide circle around it and then to circle the square in the opposite direction.
- Add some challenge, asking them to go around the circle as many times as they can without touching their feet on the ground.
- Next, set up four flat objects in a line 10'/3m apart. Ask the child to weave in and out of between the objects and to try to make it to the end of the line. Get them to try it a few times until they get the hang of it.

### Learning to pedal the bike

- Install the bike pedals, keeping the seat in a lower position. You may need a pedal wrench or multitool to do this
- To support their balance, hold the child under their armpits and encourage them to practise moving their feet from the ground to the pedals and back again, to help them get used to the pedals being there.
- Put the pedals in a 'diagonal' position with the front pedal higher than the back pedal, so that the child will be able to push down the pedals with the least effort
- Holding the bike seat or still holding the child under their armpits, get them to put one foot on the ground and the other on the pedal. Encourage them to push down on the pedals to start pedalling.
- Let the child move on their own, staying close in case you need to catch them or stop the bike if they stop pedalling or lose balance

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- Encourage the child to steer the bike between the objects already placed a line and do figure of eights

#### **Learning to stop your bike, using the brakes**

- Encourage the child to coast slowly and then brake a number of times, until they can do it without losing control of their bike.
- Put an object 20'/6m away from the child. Encourage them to coast towards it and brake before hitting the object. Repeat this until they are able to stop close to the object.

#### **Final steps**

- Raise the child's bike saddle until their leg is slightly bent when the pedal is at the 6 o'clock position, at the bottom.
- Get ready to mount your own bike. Ensure that you wear a helmet, to model good cycling behaviour.
- Encourage the child to slowly follow you while you make turns.
- Make the learning fun and praise the success of your child.

#### **Towel/Blanket Method**

This method is supposed to be the fastest way of learning how to cycle with pedals. It involves wrapping a towel around a child's chest, as a harness, which provides some additional support as the child practises balance and coordination, as well as pedalling, turning, and braking. For this method it is also a good idea to bring your own bike to demonstrate how to cycle correctly to the child.

#### **Get the bike ready**

- Ensure that the bike seat is at the right level that the child's leg is only slightly bent when placing their foot on the pedal in the bottom position (6 o'clock position).

#### **Get the towel and put in place as a "Towel Harness"**

- Get a beach towel or bedsheet.
- Fold the towel, so that it's approximately 5' long and 6" wide.
- Place the towel around the child's chest and under their armpits.
- Twist the towel behind the child, so that you have a good grip that keeps the child in place and the child cannot fall away from you.
- To stop any material getting caught in the chain, wheel or pedals, ensure that there is no excess material. If there is, refold the towel and replace around the child's waist

#### **Learning how to balance, pedal, turn and brake**

- Encourage the child to start slowly pedalling and walk/jog beside them, helping them to maintain their balance by grasping the towel.
- When they start to get comfortable with pedalling and coordination, ask them to turn their bike in

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different directions to practise turning skills.

- Teach them how to brake using a game. Ask them to pedal when you say “Green!”, to coast when you say “Yellow!”, and to brake when you say “Red!”. Keep doing this until they follow these commands with ease, then the towel can be removed.

### **Bringing it All Together without the Towel**

- Get ready to mount your own bike. Ensure that you wear a helmet, to model good cycling behaviour.
- Encourage the child to slowly follow you while you make turns.
- Make the learning fun and praise the success of your child.

### **Grass Hill Method**

This way of teaching how to cycle is great if you can access a grassy hill with a gentle incline, which allows a child to build momentum as they go down the slope. The grass also acts as protection and slows the child down when they are cycling, so they are much less likely to injure themselves.

#### **Find a slope with a gradual incline**

- Find a grass slope where there is a lot of open space in all directions,, which will allow the child to move forward gently when they are pedalling. Ensure that the area is clear and that there are no obstacles or lots of other people around.

#### **Get the bike seat ready**

- Lower the child's bike seat, so that the child's feet are flat on the ground.

#### **Learning how to balance**

- Take the child up the hill, so that the bike will begin rolling when the bike moves.
- So that the child's legs do not touch the ground or pedals, ensure that the child can straighten their legs
- Let the child know that they can slow themselves down at the bottom of the hill with their feet.
- Walk the child and the bike back up the hill and practise again and again, taking them up higher each time once they are comfortable to do so

#### **Learning how to steer and brake**

- Tell the child to brake when they have reached the bottom of the hill.
- Once they are able to brake consistently, encourage them to gently turn their bike when they get to the bottom of the hill and then to brake. when they make it to the bottom then brake. Repeat this a number of times until they are comfortable turning and braking

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### Learning how to pedal

- Adjust the child's seat until their leg is only slightly bent when the pedal is at the bottom.
- Holding the bike upright, ask the child to put their feet on the pedals.
- Tell the child to only start pedalling when they get to the bottom of the hill, ensure that the child is ready and gently push the bike slowly down the hill. Encourage the child to look up when pedalling so that they are focusing on where they are going
- When they have practised this a number of times and are comfortable, encourage them turn in wide circles, at the bottom of the hill, when pedalling

### Final steps

- Get on your own bike, so that you can show the child how to cycle. Ensure that you wear a helmet, to model good cycling behaviour.
- Encourage the child to slowly follow you while you make turns.
- Make the learning fun and praise the success of your child.