



Children's Integrated Therapies, Physiotherapy

# Learning to ride a bike

# Introduction

Like most skills, learning to ride a bike is best learnt in stages. The steps below show the order in which they should be learnt:

## 1. Ability to put a helmet on independently

Practise fastening the buckle before putting the helmet on.

Using a mirror may help to locate the buckle if it is hard to find while wearing the helmet.

## 2. Walking with the bike

Standing on the left-hand side, with the bike on your (or the child's) right, hold both handlebars and push the bike in a straight line while walking beside it.

The left side of the bike has no chain, making it an easier and cleaner side on which to stand. It is also safer to mount the bike from this side.

Children sometimes stand and walk too close to the bike and fall into it, so you may need to encourage them to stand further away.

### **3. Checking it is safe**

Look ahead and around to check that the route is clear.

### **4. Walking a bike around a corner**

The child should develop the ability to hold the handlebars and push the bike around a corner while walking beside it.

The adult should give guidance to turn a large enough circle so that the bike doesn't fall while turning.

As the child becomes more confident - or if the space to turn is limited - they may be able to hold under the saddle with one hand to lift the bike into position.

### **5. Practise using the brakes**

The child should learn to stop the bike using both brakes (while walking beside it).

The child can practise by walking with the bike and pulling the brakes with both hands on the command of the adult.

For safety reasons, it is important to learn how to use the brakes before learning how to ride.

## 6. Mounting and dismounting

The child should practise mounting and dismounting the bike by placing both hands on the handlebars and using the brakes if necessary.

They can practise getting on and off the bike from the left side, taking the right leg over the back wheel or between the seat and handle bars as appropriate, while holding both handle bars.

Use the brakes if the bike moves or you are on a slope.

## 7. Scooting on the bike

Learn to scoot on the bike while sitting on the saddle, (not standing up) and taking 'walking steps' using alternate feet or both feet together, (possibly pedals removed). Practise this in a straight line and round a corner.

Removing the pedals can make scooting easier. This is the start of learning how to balance the bike.

Encourage sitting on the saddle while scooting.

Continue to encourage safe stopping as above.

## 8. Balancing while scooting

Progress to scooting on the bike, while lifting two feet together to balance briefly (pedals removed) and safely stopping using brakes and putting feet down once stopped.

Encourage the child to look at least three metres ahead of the front wheel, but also to check if the space in front of them is clear.

The child may need to be reminded to use the brakes to stop and put their feet down as the bike slows to a halt.

## 9. Stopping safely

The child should practise stopping the bike safely if they start to lose control while scooting.

Prompts can include, "What do you do if you wobble?" and "What do you do if you start going too fast?".

## **10. Preparing the pedal position before pushing off.**

Your child will probably choose the foot that feels easiest for them to use to push off.

Explain or demonstrate to them how to lift the pedal into position by placing their toes underneath the pedal, making sure the opposite leg is not blocking the pedal from turning.

## **11. Pedalling**

The child should start to pedal the bike with constant support to balance from the adult.

Encourage the child to stop if they are leaning too far in one direction or losing control, so that they learn not to rely too much on your help for balance.

## **12. 'Pushing off' with support**

With adult support, the child should practise 'pushing off' by using the pedal, and keep moving while placing their second foot onto the pedal.

The adult will need to keep the bike and rider upright.

Some help may be needed initially to steer.

## **13. Stopping safely while riding the bike**

The child should practise stopping the bike safely using both brakes and placing both feet down on the floor.

The adult can keep encouraging with the prompt, “Brakes and feet down” if control is lost or the child leans too far in one direction.

## **14. Pedalling with less support**

The child should progress to pedalling the bike with intermittent adult support to balance.

As balance and steering improve and, if the child is reliably stopping, reduce the amount of support you are giving.

## **15. Cycling in a straight line without support.**

Encourage the child to look in front and to focus on a point at eye level in front of them.

Focusing vision will help balance and steering.

## **16. 'Pushing off without support**

The child should practise pushing off using the pedal and placing their second foot up without help to balance.

Encourage the child to keep the handlebars straight. The right amount of momentum will be needed to give time to lift the second foot onto the pedal.

## **17. Cycling around a bend**

Start with large, gentle corners where visibility is good. The child should turn the handlebars gently.

## **18. Cycling between visual markers**

The child should practise cycling between visual markers e.g. two poles or lines on the floor.

This will help the child to develop looking and steering skills and enable them to cycle around and avoid obstacles later on.



## **19. Cycling in and out of cones without support**

The child should practise cycling in and out of cones without support. This will help them to develop looking and steering skills and increase their control of the bike.

## **20. Awareness of others/obstacles**

The child should be encouraged to be aware of other people and obstacles. They should practise avoiding obstacles and stopping suddenly if necessary.

## **21. Bumpy surfaces**

The child should practise being able to identify and cope with bumpy surfaces. They should practise keeping a steady speed and avoiding bumps if possible, where it is safe to do so.

## **22. Dismounting and parking the bike safely**

The child should be encouraged to dismount and park the bike in a place where it is safe to do so.

## **23. And finally...Practise, Practise, Practise**

Learning to ride a bike safely requires patience and practise.

The child's ability will improve as they develop their skills and their ability to ride a bike becomes 'second nature' - a learned behaviour.

This is a matter of trial and error and therefore lots of practise.

Adapted from "Learning to ride a bike" by Mid Yorkshire Hospitals.



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