

Learning to Ride a Bike

Start with a Bike Helmet



Incorrect fit: Helmet sits too high upon forehead.



Correct fit: Helmet sits level across the middle of the forehead.

If you haven't already, it's time to introduce your child to a bike helmet. You may have one from when you used a bike trailer or child seat. If that helmet still fits, you can use it now.

Finding a Place to Teach Bike Riding

Choose an area where a child to learn to ride safely. Find a place that is:

- Traffic-free
- Large
- Flat
- Smooth
- Paved

This location might be a driveway, park path or empty parking lot. Empty tennis or basketball courts can also work well.

Preparing the Bike

Our method for teaching a child to ride a bike emphasizes balance first and adds pedaling later. To begin, prepare the bike as follows:

1. Remove the training wheels.

Training wheels help kids to grow accustomed to sitting on a bike and using their legs to pedal, but they won't help them learn to balance. When your child is ready to learn how to ride, remove the training wheels.

2. Remove the pedals and lower the seat.

This allows kids to sit upright with their feet flat on the ground. The goal is to help them feel more comfortable and steadier as they begin learning balance. Note: Pedals can be removed most easily using a [pedal wrench](#).

Tip: Don't lower the seat too far. Young riders should be able to sit upright with their legs straight and feet on the ground.

3. Properly inflate the bike tires.

The bike will roll more smoothly, and your child will have an easier time coasting when bike tires are inflated to the correct pressure. Look for the recommended tire pressure printed on tire sidewalls.

Learning without Pedals



Here are the step-by-step instructions:

Scooting and Coasting the Bike

Have your child begin by scooting on the modified bike so that he or she can get the feel of balancing it. This is a fairly intuitive process for many kids.

Once adept at scooting the bike, kids can be challenged to pick up their feet and coast. Make it a game: Count to 10 and see if he or she can coast with feet up for the full 10 seconds. Gradually add more time as they gain confidence in their coasting skills.

Turning and Coasting the Bike

Once kids have mastered the ability to scoot and coast the bike—and they are enjoying themselves—move on to turning and steering. Start with big, easy, looping turns.

Keep things fun with an easygoing game. A couple of ideas:

- Set up some orange safety cones in a pattern and have your child practice steering between them.
- Place a cracker on the pavement 10 feet away and encourage him or her to run over it with the bike. This game teaches children to scan ahead and to direct the bike to a specific target. Place a new cracker at 15 feet out, then 20 feet.

Making Progress

After some practice time, assess their progress. Children should be able to:

- Coast the bike with their feet up.
- Make turns while coasting.
- Look where they're going (rather than down at the bike).
- Have fun while doing all the above.

If your child reliably demonstrates all these skills, it's time to replace the pedals on the bike. For now, keep the seat in its lowered position. Children should be easily able to place their feet on the ground whenever they want to stop.

Riding with Pedals

Next Steps: Pedaling the Bike

With the pedals back on the bike, teach your child how to start moving from a stopped position.

- Have your child stand over the bike with one foot flat on the ground, and the other on a pedal raised at the 2:00 position.
- Coach your child to press down on the front pedal. Like the scooting action he or she's already mastered, this pressure will give the bike its forward momentum.
- Steady your child as he or she moves forward by placing a hand on a shoulder or the bike saddle—but let the child learn how to balance and feel comfortable on the bike without assistance.

Steering and Pedaling the Bike

As kids get the hang of pedaling a bike, they can start practicing turns. Encourage your child to do large circles and figure 8's.

Keep things fun by making a game out of steering and turning. Try one of these:

- As you did during the scooting/coasting phase, set up a line of cones (or other friendly objects) for your child to navigate.
- Or, place the now-familiar cracker about 15 feet away and encourage your child to try to run over it. It's not important that he or she runs over the cracker immediately, but it's good to provide a reachable goal. Once simple turns have been mastered, try a more elaborate pattern. For example, you can set out 3 crackers so that they form an arc on the ground. Encourage your child to try and hit each one.

Stopping the Bike

Thanks to their scooting and coasting skills, children can already stop the bike by using their feet. Now, have your child practice gently pressing on the coaster brake until he or she can use it without wobbling very much.

To practice braking skills, try another game. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Place a cracker or safety cone about 10 to 20 feet ahead on the ground and have your child try to stop before hitting it.
- Use simple verbal commands. Have a child ride 10 feet and practice responding to your shout of, "Stop!" Mix it up. Vary the distances and encourage ever-faster stops.

As your child becomes comfortable with braking, you can raise the saddle back to a standard position. To adjust the seat to its correct height, hold the bike steady and have him or her sit on the saddle. At the bottom of the pedal stroke, there should be just a slight bend (about 80-90% straight) in the knee.

Follow the Leader

Once your child can ride fairly easily, get on your bike and have him or her follow you. Take it slow and easy, and make big turns every now and then. Set up a course with cones or crackers and ride it, too. If you use crackers, see who can hit the most. (Make sure your child does.)

Remember to reinforce success rather than focus on any mistakes your child makes. One of the most important parts of cycling with very young children is to know when to stop and rest.

Taking the Bike on the Road

Once your child has successfully mastered all these skills, you can move on to bike riding as an outing.

¹ T.D. Wood (11?06?2013), *Teaching a Child to Ride a Bike*, retrieved from <http://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/teach-child-to-ride-a-bike.html>