TEACHING KIDS TO RIDE A BICYCLE

Training Your Young Cyclist

With helmet secured, it’s now time to provide basic bicycle instructions. The first task is learning to stay on the bicycle. Next, skills such as starting, stopping, turning, signaling and going up and down hills and around curves should be learned. Braking quickly must then be mastered. Young children should demonstrate these basic skills in a safe area before being allowed on public streets. It takes many hours of practice. In fact, children younger than 6 years old need close supervision even when they are permitted to ride on quiet neighborhood streets. Ride and work with your child until you are certain he or she is capable of safely and comfortably traveling roads. During this time, emphasize the following:

- Always wear a helmet.
- Stop and check for traffic before entering the roadway.
- Ride on the right, in the same direction as traffic.
- Obey all traffic signs and signals.
- Be cautious around parked cars; especially watch for opening doors.
- Use appropriate hand signals to communicate your intention to turn or stop.
- Learn vehicle rules and regulations.
- Never carry a passenger.

At last . . . you’ve bought the bike, it’s in perfect condition, the cyclist has been trained and is now capable of riding on the street. Is your job complete?

Not yet! Continue to observe your child’s riding habits and restrict cycling, if necessary. Establish limits or designate specific areas where your child is permitted to ride. Your continued supervision is always necessary. Remember, it could mean your child’s life.

RIDING AND SAFETY TIPS

If a bicycle is going to be operated in low-light conditions, such as inclement weather or after dark, ensure the bike and rider are visible by following these tips:

- The rider should wear bright, reflective clothing
- A white light should be mounted on the front of the bike
- A red light should be mounted on the back of the bike so the rider is visible to the rear

When possible, children should avoid riding after dark. If your child is out after dark, remind him or her to walk the bike home, and keep away from the street or roadway if possible.
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PURCHASING A BICYCLE

Bikes are a lot of fun, and most children want one. Before buying your child a bike, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Is my child mentally and physically ready to ride a bicycle in neighborhood traffic? And has my child received proper instructions on how to safely operate a bicycle?

A bicycle is not a toy. In fact, bicycles are considered vehicles, and cyclists must generally follow the same traffic laws as automobile drivers. Make sure your child is mature enough to handle this responsibility.

2. Do we live in an area with minimal traffic? If the answer is no, are there safe places to operate a bicycle near my home—such as empty lots, parks or bicycle paths?

If you answered “no” and your child is not old enough to ride on the street, it may be a good idea to postpone a bicycle purchase. Doing so could save your child from serious injury or death.

TYPES OF BICYCLES

Bicycles are manufactured in four basic types:

- **Single-speed middleweight**—Coaster brakes; recommended for young cyclists
- **BMX**—Modified frame, special wheels, competition handlebars and seat, and hand brakes
- **Multi-speed lightweight**—For long-distance cycling, hill climbing and racing; equipped with hand brakes and requires maintenance
- **All-terrain or mountain**—Sturdy, multi-speed, wide tires, upright handlebars, hand brakes and off-road capabilities

Coaster brakes are recommended over hand brakes for young children. Wait until your child has developed greater strength in the hands and wrists before buying a bike with hand brakes. This may not occur until the child has reached the age of 10.

HOW THE BIKE SHOULD FIT THE CHILD

To determine if a bike is the proper size, the rider should be able to sit on the seat and balance the bicycle with both feet just touching the ground. The bicycle should not lean to one side. The seat may require some adjustments to accomplish this.

If the seat is in the lowest position and the child cannot touch both feet to the ground, the bicycle is too large. Avoid the dangerous practice of buying a large bicycle with the assumption that your child will grow into it.

**Typical size of bike for average child**

- Under 6 years* 12”–16” wheel
- 6 to 9 years* 20” wheel
- 9 to 11 years 24” wheel
- 12 and older 26” or larger wheel

* Children age 6 and under need close supervision—even on quiet neighborhood streets.

SAFETY FEATURES TO LOOK FOR ON A BICYCLE

For maximum safety, bicycles should be equipped with:

- Working brakes
- Front light (white)
- Rear light (red)
- Reflective devices on front, rear, sides and pedals
- Warning bell or horn
- Safety flag
- Chain guard
- Hand grips

**BICYCLE STATISTICS**

Bicycles are associated with more childhood injuries than any other consumer product besides the automobile. (Consumer Products Safety Commission)

743 cyclists were killed in traffic crashes in 2013. Cyclists under age 16 accounted for 8 percent (61) of those fatalities, with males accounting for 56 of the 61. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

In 2013, nearly 50,000 cyclists were injured in motor vehicle crashes, with 12 percent (an estimated 6,000) of them under the age of 16. (NHTSA)