



Children's Community Physiotherapy

Learning to ride a bike

A step-by-step guide to helping your child learn to ride a bike.

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

1. Ability to put helmet on independently.

Practice 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. Standing on the left hand side (with bike on their right), being able to hold both handlebars and push the bike in a straight line while walking beside it.

The left side has no chain making it an easier and cleaner side to stand and it is safer to mount from this side in the future.

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

4. Ability to hold handlebars and push the bike around a corner while walking beside it.

Give guidance to turn a large enough circle so that the bike doesn't fall while turning. As children become more confident or if space is limited they may be able to hold under the saddle with one hand to lift the bike into position.

5. Able to stop bike using both brakes (while walking beside it) to a verbal command.

It is important for safety to learn how to use the brakes before learning how to ride.

6. Able to mount and dismount bike, placing both hands on the handlebars and using brakes, if necessary.

Practice getting on and off the bike from the left side, (taking right leg over the back wheel or between seat and handle bars as appropriate) holding both handle bars. Use the brakes if the bike moves or you are on a slope.

7. Able to scoot on bike sitting on the saddle, (not standing up) taking 'walking steps' using feet alternately or together, (possibly pedals removed) in a straight line and round a corner.

Removing pedals makes 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. Able to scoot on the bike, lifting two feet together to balance briefly (pedals removed) and safely stop using brakes and putting feet down once stopped.

Encourage looking at least three metres ahead of the front wheel, but also checking if the space in front is clear. The child may need to be reminded to use the brakes to stop and put the feet down as the bike slows to a halt.

9. Able to stop bike safely if starting 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. Able to prepare pedal position ready to push off.
 - a. Your child will probably choose the foot that feels easiest for them to use to push off.
 - b. Explain or demonstrate how to lift the pedal into position by placing toes underneath the pedal, making sure the opposite leg is not blocking the pedal from turning.

11. Able to pedal bike with constant support to balance.

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

12. Able to 'push off' with support using pedal, and to keep moving, while placing second foot onto pedal.

The helpers will need to keep the bike and rider upright. Some help may be needed initially to steer.

13. Able to stop bike safely using both brakes, and placing both feet down on the floor.

Keep encouraging "brakes and feet down" if control is lost or the child leans too far.

14. Able to pedal bike with intermittent support to balance.

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

15. Able to cycle 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. Able to push off using pedal and place second foot up without help to balance.

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

17. Able to cycle around a bend without support.

- a. Start with large gentle corners where visibility is good.
- b. Encourage them to keep looking ahead as well as up.

18. Able to cycle between a visual marker e.g. two poles or lines on the floor.

This will help to develop looking and steering skills and being able to cycle around and avoid obstacles later on.

19. Able to cycle in/out of cones without support.

This will help to develop looking and steering and increased control of the bike.

20. Able to cycle with awareness of others, avoiding obstacles or stopping suddenly if necessary.

21. Able to cope with bumpy surfaces when cycling.

22. Able to dismount and park the bike safely.

If attention to task is a problem, ability will improve when the child has automated the skill. This is a matter of trial and error and lots of practice



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

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