

# A Safe Ride For Kids on Bikes

## Bike riding is great for kids!

Riding toys help toddlers learn new skills. As kids get older, bicycling gives them exercise and independence. Bike riding is also lots of fun!

A bike is a child's first vehicle. Learning to ride on the street should start in third or fourth grade. It is a child's first step in driver education. However, many kids never get any bike safety classes at school. Most kids learn to ride in their neighborhood from parents and friends.



**Start helmet use early!** Be firm about using a helmet on ride-on toys and tricycles. Children learn healthy habits best if they start when they are very young.

Children learn from what their parents do. If you ride a bike, wear your own helmet. They will, too. Show them how to ride on the right, stop at stop signs and lights, and use hand signals.



## Why are kids at such high risk of injury?

Children are not ready to ride on streets just because they know how to pedal and balance on a bike. It takes years of practice for children to gain the skill, knowledge, and judgment to ride safely in traffic.

Young children often act without thinking. They do not understand the danger of moving vehicles. Older children often take risks.

Do not expect your children to understand and follow traffic laws until they are at least 10 years old. You must be the one to decide when your children are ready to ride safely on the street. Watch them or ride with them until you know they can "drive" their bikes correctly.

### A message for drivers

Drivers, including parents, need to share the road with bicyclists. Give them space on the street and watch for sudden moves.

## But riding can be risky, too!

- The most serious injuries children could get while biking are brain injuries. These cannot be cured but most can be prevented.
- Helmets can reduce the risk of serious brain injury by 75 percent. This is why many places have bike helmet laws.
- Children can be seriously injured from falls on sidewalks and trails as well as in collisions with cars. Even toddlers riding three-wheeled cycles can be severely injured.
- Parents may want to bicycle with a small child in a bike seat or trailer. See Resources, page 2, for details on safety, selection, and use.
- Boys 11 to 15 years of age have the highest rate of injuries on bicycles. They also take the most risks.
- Babies should not be carried on bikes or in trailers until **at least** age 1, according to doctors and safety experts. A baby's neck is not strong enough to hold his or her heavy head on a bumpy ride. A baby in a carrier can be seriously hurt if the bike tips over, even when it is parked.
- Children under age 10 should not ride on streets without an adult. They need to learn traffic rules and practice on quiet streets with an adult first. Parents must make sure they have the skills and judgment to cope with traffic.



Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride



## What can parents do for bike safety?

### Infants, toddlers, & preschoolers

Wait to take a baby on an adult's bike until she is **at least** age 1. A baby's neck is not strong enough to hold up a helmet. Constant bouncing could harm her brain.

**A toddler** needs a helmet that is very light weight. A toddler helmet should cover the back of the head as well as the forehead (picture). Make sure it fits snugly. Adjust the strap and buckle it.

Find safe places for your child to ride, such as a sidewalk or a paved park. Stay with your child wherever she rides.



### Children in kindergarten & early elementary grades

A bike that is the right size is safest and easiest to learn on. Make sure your child can stand with both feet on the ground when straddling the bike.

Be firm about helmet use. If your children think that you do not really care, they will ride without their helmets.

Your child is not old enough to ride on the street until at least age 10. Playgrounds, bike paths, and sidewalks are much safer. Stay close to your child when he rides. Teach him to stop and look both ways for cars at drive-ways and to respect others using sidewalks and paths.

### Children in grades four and above

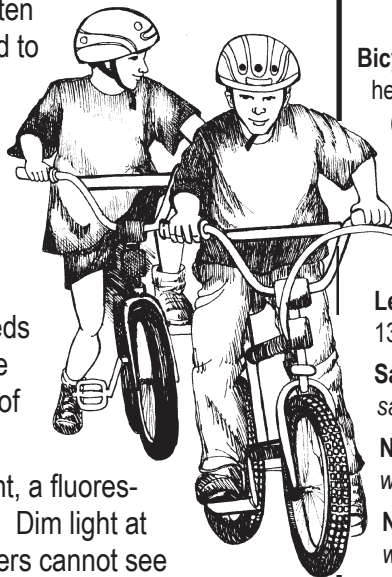
Older children are most likely to get injured riding a bike because they ride so much. They also like to take risks. Be clear to your child that he must wear his helmet at all times. Let him pick out a helmet that he likes. Remind him that all bike racers wear them.

Be sure your child's bike fits well (see kindergarten section above). A bicycle that is too big is very hard to ride safely.

Make sure the bike is in good condition. Teach your child how to check the tires, chain, brakes, and seat post before riding.

Your child needs to be aware that a bike is a vehicle. When riding on the street, bicyclists must follow the same laws as car drivers. Your child needs to learn to ride on the right, use hand signals before turning or stopping, obey traffic rules, and be wary of motor vehicles.

Make sure drivers can see your child. In daylight, a fluorescent-colored shirt or helmet cover is easiest to see. Dim light at dusk or dawn can be very dangerous because drivers cannot see bicyclists well. Riders often do not realize this. If your child is not home by dusk, it is important for him to call you to be picked up.



## Tips for safe helmet use

Teach your children to use their helmets correctly. Let them know that you expect them to wear their helmets on every ride.

- Choose a helmet that meets the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standard. It should fit snugly with as little soft padding as possible.
- Make sure the helmet covers the top of the forehead.
- Adjust the strap to be snug under the chin. It should pull down the helmet when your child opens her mouth. Check strap fit often.
- Make sure your child wears the helmet every time she rides, even around the neighborhood.
- Replace a helmet used in a crash.
- Don't let your child wear a helmet when climbing on play structures or in trees.

### Make Your Community Bike-Friendly!

*A local helmet program can help make kids think helmets are "cool." Encourage your child's childcare center or preschool, school, or youth group to have bike helmet sales and teach bike safety. Help build bike trails.*

### Bike Safety Resources

**Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute:** information on helmets and bike carriers, [www.helmets.org/](http://www.helmets.org/) (click on "Children")

**Pedestrian & Bicycling Information Center:** [www.bicyclinginfo.org](http://www.bicyclinginfo.org) (click on "Education and Enforcement"), 919-962-2203

**League of American Bicyclists:** 202-822-1333, [www.bikeleague.org/programs/education](http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/education)

**Safe Kids USA:** Safety Tips, [www.usa.safekids.org](http://www.usa.safekids.org)

**National Highway Traffic Safety Admin.:** [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) (search for "bike safety")

**National Center for Safe Routes to School:** [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

**International Bicycle Fund:** using bike carriers, trailers; [www.ibike.org/education/infant.htm](http://www.ibike.org/education/infant.htm)