

Child Bike Safety Talk

Summary: This basic talk is designed as an intro to bicycle safety for kids.

- Bike Safety is more than wearing a helmet
- It's more than just balance
- You need to learn the survival rules!

What we will cover:

- The four rules to avoid fatal crashes
- Wearing a helmet,
- Bike maintenance for safety
- Teaching your parents how to ride

The Safety Rules Can Protect You

1. Never ride out into a street without stopping first.

Nearly a third of car-bike crashes involving kids occur when the kid rides a bicycle down a driveway or from a sidewalk into the street and in front of a car. You must learn to stop, look left, look right, look left again and listen to be sure no cars are coming before entering a street. Look left that second time because cars coming from the left are on your side of the street and are closer--they're the first ones that can hit you! You need to practice that: looking left, looking right and looking left again. Make it a habit. And remember, you see the car, but that does not mean the driver sees you! You must always assume that the driver has not seen you. They may be dialing a cell phone or lighting a cigarette. If there are cars parked at the curb, always go to the edge of the street where you can see the traffic coming before you start your right and left looking.

2. Obey stop signs.

Nearly a third of the car-bike crashes with kids occur when the kid rides through a stop sign or red light without yielding to crossing traffic. You must learn to stop, look left, look right, then look left again at all stop signs, stop lights and intersections before crossing. If you arrive at the intersection at the same time as a car, never assume the car sees you. Wait for them to look and wave you on before crossing, even if you are on the through street. Do you know the basics about stop signs and stop lights? You need to go to a controlled intersection with your parents and practice crossing safely. When you ride in a group, each rider must stop and make sure it is clear before crossing. (see Rule 4 below) If it's a bad intersection, walk your bike. It is the law to obey traffic signals even when no one appears to be coming. And the law about one way streets applies to you. Lots of kids get hit on one way streets going the wrong way

because drivers don't expect them to be there, so they are not looking for a bike.

3. Check behind before swerving, turning or changing lanes.

Nearly a third of the car-bike crashes involving kids occur when a rider turns suddenly into the path of the cars. You must learn to look behind you, signal and look behind again before swerving, turning or changing lanes. The best place to practice this is in a quiet parking lot or playground. Ride along a straight painted line and practice looking back over your shoulder without swerving off the painted line. That's not as easy as you think. You should not ride your bike on a street until you have learned to do that.

4. Never follow another rider without applying the rules.

Many fatalities occur when the first rider violates one of the three rules above and the second one just blindly follows and gets hit by a car. The accident report will show one of the three rules above caused the crash, but the real reason was following another rider. Running stop signs or red lights, riding out of driveways or zipping across lanes all seem natural to you if you are following the other rider and not thinking about the rules. So this is a hard one to learn. Be extra careful when you are following another rider.

Wear a helmet!

1. Why wear a helmet?

Every year about 700 people die in the U.S. from bicycle crashes. Most of them die from head injuries. Many more have their brains scrambled and live for a long time or sometimes for the rest of their lives with something that doesn't function right up there. Brain damage can cause learning disabilities, personality changes and rob you of the ability to think clearly. Studies show that a helmet can prevent that about 48 to 85 per cent of the time. So you don't want to ride a bike without one, even on your block, on the sidewalk or on a bike trail. The fall is from the same height wherever you ride, and it's the fall that gets you, not the forward speed.

2. Make sure it fits

Your helmet needs adjustment to give you all the protection you paid for. Make sure the pads touch all around. Make sure the straps meet in a V just under your ear. Adjust the length of the front and back straps to hold the helmet level on your head, not tilted back. Make sure the chin strap is snug but doesn't dig in. With all of that done your helmet should stay on when you shake your head in any direction or have a friend try to pull the helmet off.

3. Don't wear it on the playground

A few kids have died from strangulation on monkey bars or other playground equipment when their helmet got caught. Take your helmet off when you get off your bike! Don't wear it on the playground or when you are climbing trees.

4. Other gear

- Gloves protect the skin on your hands
- Skaters' knee and elbow pads are good protection too.
- Eye protection helps keep bugs and dust out of your eyes.

Your Bike

- Adjust it or have your parents adjust it to be sure you can reach pedals, bars and brakes comfortably.
- Try the brakes and make sure they are working well.
- Check the tires for air. Just pinch them to see if they have gone soft.
- Check seat, pedals and handlebars to be sure they are tight.
- Lube the chain if it squeaks. It will eventually break if you don't.

Riding

- Be careful where you ride. Riding on streets is not like riding on a playground--it's much more dangerous and you have to be much more careful. Traffic is a problem almost everywhere. A driver talking on a cell phone has no better reactions than a drunk.
- Follow the four rules we have talked about. Do you remember them?

Teach your parents well

- Lots of parents never got a talk on bike safety when they were in school.
- You can teach them about the safety rules--if you can remember them.
- You can also teach them about helmets. They should wear one to be a good example for you if for no other reason.

Be safe on your bike. It's a lot of fun to ride, and it gets you places on your own power, without using up the planet's supply of gasoline.

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