

# The Ins and Outs of Bicycle Riding

Summer is a great opportunity for parents and children to spend time together without having to worry about completing homework. This time can be spent teaching your child to ride a bicycle. Once learned, it is a skill that is never forgotten. In the past, a parent would hold the bike while the child tried to learn to balance and pedal simultaneously. It would hurt the parent's back, and the child would get upset if the parent lets go, causing the child to fall.

There is a method of teaching your child to ride a bicycle that allows the child to be more independent in the learning process and doesn't involve any back strains or distrust. A child can start to learn to ride beginning at the age of three. It is recommended to begin learning to pedal and steer on a tricycle. Pedaling requires significant lower extremity strength, and steering requires coordination. Once a child has mastered these skills, he/she is ready to progress to a bicycle. Every child is different, but typically by the time he/she has reached five or six years of age, he/she has mastered riding a tricycle. If your child is having difficulty riding a tricycle, you may want to consult with a physical therapist as there can be underlying strength and/or coordination delays.

Use the following steps to teach your child how to ride a bicycle:

1. Lower the seat to the point that the child can put his/her feet on the ground.
2. Remove any training wheels.
3. It is preferred to remove the pedals as they may be an obstacle to the child's legs, but it is not necessary.
4. Find a surface with a very slight slope - almost flat.
5. Strap on a helmet. Elbow pads and shin guards are optional.
6. Start about 15 yards up the slope. If necessary, hold the bike while the child gets on. Have him/her put both feet on the ground. Then you should let go of the bike so that the child can balance.
7. Tell your child to lift his/her feet about an inch off the ground and coast down the hill/slope or scoot along. The objective is to get a feel for balancing on the bike. Because the bike will coast slowly, the rider can put his/her feet down if he/she gets scared. Be sure to give a lot of praise for every improvement.
8. Repeat these steps until your child feels comfortable coasting and doesn't put his/her feet down to stop.

Once your child maintains a steady balance without putting his/her feet down, it is time to add the pedals.

1. Reattach the pedals if they were removed. Have your child put his/her feet on the pedals and coast down. After several trials, have him/her begin pedaling as he/she is rolling.
2. When your child is comfortable coasting/pedaling, raise the saddle in small increments, and do a few more coasting/pedaling runs. <sup>i</sup>

It may take several attempts to learn, but your child will have more confidence in his/her ability to independently ride since he/she mastered each phase of learning without assistance. Now that your

child has learned to ride a bicycle, you can enjoy riding with him/her. Bicycle riding is not only great exercise and lots of fun, but it is a great social experience when riding with friends or family.

Please remember safety comes first and always wear a helmet. If you have any questions regarding bicycle riding and your child, please email [ellie@thetherapygym.com](mailto:ellie@thetherapygym.com).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ibike.org/education/teaching-kids.htm>