

## Sequence for teaching child (and adults) to ride a bike:

### Feeling the balance:

1. Select a bike where the seat can be lowered enough so the learner can be seated and have both feet flat on the ground. Lower the seat to the point that the learner can put their feet on the ground. Remove any training wheels. You can also remove the pedals, but most students seem to be able to go through the first exercises without any problems with the pedals attached.
2. Find a grassy field with a gentle downhill of 30 yards or so, that then flattens out or goes uphill slightly. Ideally the grass is short enough that it doesn't create too much drag on the wheels, but still can provide a soft landing in case of a fall.. A hard surface learning area can also be used, but it should have only a very slight slope - almost flat.
3. Strap a helmet. Tuck in shoelaces. Long pants (rubber banded, strapped or tucked into the socks) and gloves can add additional protection if it is warranted.
4. Go about 15 yards up the hill. If necessary, hold the bike while the student gets on. Have him or her put both feet on the ground, then you should be able to let go of the bike and nothing should happen. Praise the learner.
5. Tell your student to lift his or her feet about an inch off the ground and coast down the hill or scoot along. The objective here is to get a feel for balancing on the bike. Try to resist holding the bike to steady the learner. Because the bike will coast slowly, the cyclists can put his or her feet down if they get scared. He or she might want you to run beside the bike the first few times; do so, but don't hold the bike. Let the rider feel the balance. Give a lot of praise for every improvement. Help count the seconds that they balance and make a game of it. Hopefully, they improve on almost every pass.  
**Tip:** Through this process, if the cyclist keeps their knees (and feet) close to the bicycle, they will tend to be able to balance better and not swerve as much.
6. Repeat until your student feels comfortable coasting and doesn't put his or her feet down to stop. Throughout the progression there is no need to rush moving on to the next step.

### Add pedaling:

1. Reattach the pedals, if they were removed (initial screw the pedals on by hand so that you don't cross-thread them, which is fairly easy to do.) Now have your student put his or her feet on the pedals and coast down. First just one pedal, then both pedals. After several runs, have him or her begin pedaling as he or she is rolling.
2. Repeat coasting/pedaling until the bicyclist feels comfortable, then move up the hill. When the student is comfortable coasting/pedaling at this level, raise the saddle in small increments and do a few more coast/pedaling runs. You can add some exercises where they stop by braking sooner than they would just from friction with the ground.

### Riding in a straight line:

1. Go to a flat part of the field, cul-de-sac, empty unused parking lot, etc., and practice starting from a standstill, riding in a straight line, stopping, and turning.
  - a. Starting from a standstill - Start with one pedal pointed at the handlebars (2 o'clock -- the power position). This gives the rider a solid pedal stroke to power the bike and keep it steady until the other foot finds the pedal. Kids tend to want to rush and take short cuts on this and get off to very wobbly starts. Work to have them develop habits so that they consistently get smooth steady starts.

- b. Riding straight - Look straight ahead. Keep the elbows and knees loose and pedal smooth circles. When a novice rider turns his or her head, their arms and shoulders follow, causing the bike to swerve.
- c. Stopping - Apply both brakes at the same time (if the bike has both front and rear brakes). Using just the front brake can launch the rider over the handlebars. Using just the rear brake limits the rider to just 20 or 30 percent of braking power and the bike is more likely skid.

Add turning:

1. Turning - Initially, slow down before entering a corner. Turning is a combination of a little leaning and a very little steering. Keep the inside pedal up and look through the turn. As confidence grows let the speed gradually increase.
2. When the cyclist is ready to get into any environment that includes cars they should ride like a car. (This may be a couple years later.) This keeps the kid from swooping and swerving on roads, running stop signs and riding on the wrong side of the road. See [Teach Your Child Well: Bicycle Safety Issues](#).

Going for a bike ride

1. As kids master the skills of bicycling and want to go on longer rides, keep it interesting at their level: bring snacks, plan appropriate rest breaks (initially, these may be a mile apart), stop for fun activities (i.e. play ground, beach, chase butterflies, ice cream shop, etc.) and invite your kid's friend along.
2. Don't neglect zero-tolerance [safe bicycling behavior](#) from the start.
3. [Tips For Getting Started Bicycling](#)

Note: the highest rate of bike-related head injuries is among boys 10-14 years old. For more information on helmets go to [www.ibike.org/education/helmet.htm](http://www.ibike.org/education/helmet.htm).

### **Tips and Common Mistakes in teaching bicycling**

- Don't make learning day the first day on a new bike. You eliminate some of the avalanche of new experiences and emotion, if you use a bike that they are familiar with (one they have had with training wheels or an older siblings), or one borrow from a friend. The new bike can be a reward for mastering two wheels. If you need to use a new bike put training wheels on it and let them get used to it for a couple weeks before trying two wheels.
- Don't use the one-training-wheel method. It doesn't teach balance and is not uniformly unstable.
- If you use the hold-the-back-of-the-seat (better) or run-beside-the-bike method, don't trick your child by claiming you're holding on when you are not. If the child crashes, you erode trust, which erodes confidence. Before you begin a run, tell your child you plan to let go when he or she looks stable. When they are stable, tell them again that you are going to let go BEFORE you do. Make sure they stay stable before you release and then stick with them until they have substantially mastered the skill.
- Don't expect the learning process will be crash-free -- though the one describe above likely will be. Be ready to comfort, coerce, cheerlead and bandage -- and possibly to wait for another day.