



CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 35

Children really benefit from riding to school

During the 1970s, about 60 per cent of children in primary years five, six and seven, rode a bicycle to and from school. By 2006, that figure had fallen to less than three per cent, despite the fact that in the past 30 years, overall cycling levels in the general community have increased dramatically.

With obesity and climate change becoming two of the biggest challenges facing our nation, children need to be encouraged to use their bikes more often and that task is actually easy, because they really want to ride to school – just ask them!

It gives youngsters responsibility, independence and a real sense of freedom that is often lacking in today's cotton wool world.

The main barrier to children cycling to school seems to be parental concerns about road safety, but these can be addressed with some route planning and instruction to the child about basic rules. Parents must ensure the child is always wearing a helmet and bright clothing when out riding.

They should explain the need to ride in single file on paths, ringing the bell when approaching pedestrians from behind, and wheeling a bike across crosswalks or children's crossings. It is also vital to emphasise the need for care at intersections and to watch out for vehicles from driveways.

From a skills perspective, it is important that the child be able to perform the hand signals for left turn, right turn and stop, be able to maintain a straight line while looking behind for traffic, and to know how to brake on loose or wet surfaces.



The Road Aware school safety curriculum includes a series of junior bicycle training activity sheets that parents may find helpful, and these can be downloaded from the DPI cycling website (www.dpi.wa.gov.au/cycling).

Authorities agree that children under nine should not ride without adult supervision as they may not yet have fully developed the peripheral vision and hearing required to ride busier routes, but by the age of ten most children will have developed the necessary sensory skills to ride on their own.

Parents should find the best route to school by selecting one with the fewest roads to cross and ideally using paths (WA children under the age of 12 are permitted to ride on footpaths, unless there is a no cycling sign) or very quiet streets. This route survey is best done on a weekday to get a good understanding of traffic flows.

Another parental barrier to cycling is a concern about personal safety. In addition to reinforcing the principles of stranger danger, children can be encouraged to ride in groups and to choose a route that is open and well lit, even if it slightly longer. Parents can seek out students who live nearby and establish agreed days and times on which they can meet and ride together.

A lack of secure bicycle parking facilities at school can also be a disincentive. School authorities can play their part by providing racks and cages where students can leave their bikes in the morning, knowing they will still be there in the afternoon.

This fact sheet is one of a series dealing with the use of bicycles for recreation and transport in Western Australia. The series looks at a range of cycling-related topics including ride routes, touring tips, maintenance, safety, road rules, insurance and product reviews. You can find more cycling fact sheets online at www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling

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