



## CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 15

# Teaching a child to ride should be done in steps

The look on a child's face when they receive their first proper bicycle is one of life's great moments. It is a crucial step on the way to independence and parents need to gradually prepare the novice cyclist for what lies ahead.

This exposure can start early. Even very young children benefit from riding a tricycle around the yard, because they are learning how to pedal and steer. A simple push scooter can also teach a child about balance.

As soon as the youngster is proficient on a trike, you can move them up to a small bicycle with training wheels. Make sure the support wheels are correctly set so that the bike always has a slight lean.

The training wheels can be raised a little further every week or so, but let the child learn balancing skills at his or her own pace. The average age for mastering balance is about six years but normal variation is between four and nine.

When moving up to a larger bike, it is important to find the right fit. Sitting on the seat, the child should be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground and reach the handlebars comfortably.

If balance is still a problem at this stage, it may be time to discard the training wheels and consider running with the young rider. Find an empty parking lot or other open area and begin by holding the child on the shoulders so that they lean to the side. They will feel the side pressure and learn to reduce it by turning into the lean.

Progress to holding the back of the seat as they ride along, letting go for a few seconds when the child appears stable. Keep them informed about what you are doing otherwise you may erode their confidence. Gradually increase the "let go time" until they are riding on their own.

If the bicycle has two hand brakes, now is the time to show the child how to stop smoothly by applying the rear one a split second before the front.



Falls are a part of life and children need to be encouraged to try again if they happen to take a tumble. Gloves and kneepads can help soften the blow. When the child is confident about cycling on their own around a traffic-free area, hop on your bike and accompany them on a ride along paths and then down some quiet streets with flat terrain.

Teaching a child to ride involves more than just the basic skills of steering, braking and balancing. Safety and courtesy must be part of the learning process. Young cyclists need to get used to always wearing a helmet and bright clothing.

During longer rides together, parents should explain to children about the various path and road rules such as giving way, using the bell and keeping left. A demonstration of the hand signals for left turn, right turn and stop is also important. Defensive riding is a great habit to develop at an early age. Children who have been taught to constantly scan for things up ahead, and to look for cars reversing out of driveways, are going to be safer.

***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](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling)***

Cycling Unit  
Department of Transport  
441 Murray Street, Perth WA 6000  
Tel: (08) 9216 8000  
Fax: (08) 9216 8497  
Email: [cycling@transport.wa.gov.au](mailto:cycling@transport.wa.gov.au)