Bicycling, Ages 13-17

Cycling with more independence carries with it greater responsibility. Cyclists hitting their teenage years are probably ready to cycle further and faster. They may be exploring bike racing, touring, or trail riding. But even though the teenage cyclist's skills and interests may have changed a lot since childhood, they should be reminded that the rules of the road remain the same.

A great lesson for the teenage cyclist is to learn to treat his or her newfound responsibility and freedom as a privilege. Risky behaviors put cyclists at the mercy of motor vehicles. Teen cyclists should by all means enjoy the ride, but always keep their movements visible and predictable.

A bike is no match for a 2000 to 5,000 pound vehicle. Most teenagers will learn to drive a car and get their driver's license. When they do, it's important they do not forget what it's like to be a cyclist. Emphasize that cyclists in this age group should not let the new-found freedom of driving get in the way of common sense. To avoid injury or worse, it's extremely important that as a motorist and as a cyclist, they should act safely and share the road.

- Teach the teenage cyclist to continue to work on good riding skills, such as performing panic stops, and riding in the winter and in bad weather.
- Teach teen cyclists about off road and trail bicycling.
- Teach this age group the most important traffic laws for bicyclists. Explain different crashes, typical situations and crash types, and how to steer clear of them.
- Although it's not recommended for anyone to ride at night, show teenage cyclists how to be prepared if they ever do.
  - Use proper lights. Blinking red brake lights are better than stationary ones. A bright white headlight is highly recommended and even required in some states.
  - Wear light and/or reflective clothing. Reflectors can be worn on ankles; reflective stickers can be affixed to bags or backpacks.
- Emphasize the importance of wearing a helmet. Although helmets might not have seemed so “dorky” when they were younger, teenagers are likely to be tempted not to wear helmets. Tell them to think about how uncool brain damage is. Properly wearing a good-fitting helmet reduces a cyclist's risk of major injury and/or fatality by as much as 88%.
- Explain that it is extremely useful and wise to brush up on bicycling safety fundamentals when a teenager moves to a city or college. While there, he or she may not have a car and will be using a bike as a major mode of transportation.

This information is courtesy of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency. **The laws may be different in your state. Be sure to know what they are and to respect them**.

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