Bicycling, Ages 1-5

Whether a child is still a bicycle passenger traveling with a parent or adult on an approved child safety seat, or just beginning to try riding under adult supervision, it's never too soon to start teaching her or him the basics of bicycling safety.

Although preschool cyclists do not have the learning and understanding skills necessary to deal with complex cycling situations, it is important that this age group begins learning basic safety rules and motor skills. Getting a head start on safety now will put kids on the track to smart, lifelong cycling.

- Children under the age of one should never be transported on a bicycle. Until a child is able to hold up his or her head independently, do not allow her or him to ride as a passenger.
- Most children under the age of five will probably not be ready to cycle. But for those who want to learn, they must always remain under the close supervision of a parent or other adult caretaker.
- For the preschool cyclist, the basics are key. Learning to control a bicycle while beginning to understand the ways to be careful when you cycle are the most important lessons a child of this age can learn.
- Bicycles are fun to ride, but they are not toys. Teach preschool cyclists that bicycles are different from a Big Wheel or a toy tricycle. Never let them ride without an adult nearby.
- For preschoolers who are still strictly bicycle seat passengers, talk to them about safety as you cycle. Explain why you are stopping to look for traffic, etc. Remember, children will learn to do whatever they see parents and adults do!
- Teach the under 5 cyclist to balance and control the bicycle, to cycle in a straight line, to turn without falling, to pedal smoothly, and to stop and start.
- Teach preschool cyclists how a crash can happen and how to look out for things that could hurt them: Watch out for cars going in and out of driveways. Stay away from cars with engines running. Stop when you get to the end of a sidewalk or driveway. Watch out for other bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Teach the under-fives to stay away from the street. Emphasize how hard it is for drivers to see little kids on bicycles and show them how they can make themselves more visible.
- Help children pick out the right bike and helmet that best suits their needs and size. Explain why helmets are so important and must be worn at all times. Wear your helmet and set a good example.
- Teach preschoolers about the different parts of a bike and helmet. Show them how to use the bike's brakes to slow and stop. Teach them to keep their hands and feet away from the spokes and chains. Teach them the importance of getting a bicycle repaired when something is broken.

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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