

Teaching Your Child How to Bicycle - Clinic for Parents

Connie Szabo Schmucker, Advocacy Director,
Bicycle Garage Indy

cschmucker@bgindy.com

317-777-9630

Videos of students

<https://www.facebook.com/BicycleGarageofIndy/videos/363119050900584/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BicycleGarageofIndy/videos/10156373442943308/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BicycleGarageofIndy/videos/758978644447621/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BicycleGarageofIndy/videos/10156569334578308/>

Setting up for Success

Riding a bike can be a fun experience for children, but sometimes anxiety and frustration get in the way. How can a parent help a child overcome such obstacles?

At this clinic, parents will learn tips and strategies to guide their children toward becoming happy, confident riders of two-wheeled bicycles. Topics include:

How to configure a bike for practice

Selecting the best place to practice

How to separate balancing, pedaling, and stopping into three distinct skills (rather than lumping them together)

How to respond to children's frustrations

Setting up the Bike

The bike should be slightly smaller and have hand brakes.

It's helpful to take off pedals at first so they are out of the way (and can be incentives and milestones).

Seat should be lowered so the rider's feet are flat on the ground when seated on the seat.

Rider should wear tennis shoes and comfortable clothing.

Seat position for learning to bicycle



Location for bike riding lessons

Look for a quiet parking lot with slight downhill (look for drains).

Step 1 Braking with Hand Brakes

Have your child walk with the bike, both hands on the handlebars, body closer to the handlebars than the seat.

Walk the length of the parking lot, say “Brake” and they should use the right brake. Do this a couple of times. Use both brakes on the way back.

Right brake = Rear brake

Left brake = Front brake (only use with Rear Brake)

If the bike has one hand brake, it is probably for the rear wheel only.

***When braking, use either right or both, never left by itself.

Step 2 Getting On/Off the Bike

To get on the bike (end up standing over the bike):

Stand close to the handlebars, both hands on the handlebars, with brakes on so the bike doesn't roll.

Swing the leg that is closest to the bike over the back of the seat and rear tire and stand in front of the seat.

To get off the bike, make sure the bike is stable and stand in front of the seat. .

With both brakes on, swing one leg over the seat and rear wheel so that the rider ends up with both legs on one side of the bike.

Mounting and Dismounting the bike



Step 3 Pushing off and Coasting

Sit on the seat.

Push off with both feet (like scraping mud off bottom of shoes).

Make sure the bike is straight.

Have the rider look up and at an object ahead.

Count off “1-2-3 Push”

Goal is to keep feet up as long as possible. If starts getting wobbly, (losing momentum), rider should brake and then put feet down.

Coasting / gliding



Step 4 Longer Coasts

Work toward longer coasts - give praise for small successes along the way.

First 5 feet, then 10, then 20, working way up to 40 feet of coasting.

This is the key to learning to balance a bicycle: whichever way you start to lean, turn the front wheel in that same direction, even if it means going in a circle. Follow the bike wherever it wants to go.

Step 5 Adding a pedal

Once the rider has coasted 40 feet with one push consistently, it's time to add a pedal.

If the rider is right-handed, add right pedal. Add left pedal for left-handed riders.

Start the same way (both feet pushing off), but have the pedal in the 6:00 position (straight down). Practice finding the pedal without looking down while the bike is stopped and the rider is on the seat.

Once the rider has a good coast going, have them rest their foot on the pedal. If don't have a good coast, don't try to place foot on pedal.

Step 6 Starting with Pedal

Once coasting and resting foot on the pedal has been mastered, it's time to start with the pedal instead of pushing off on the ground.

Place the pedal in a position so it is even with the downtube on the bike (2:00 for right pedal, 10:00 for left pedal).

Have rider sit on the seat, place weight on left foot on the ground and place right foot on pedal (weight on right foot on the ground and place left foot on pedal for left-handers). When pushing off, push off with the foot on the ground and push down with the foot on the pedal. Continue to coast once the pedal foot reaching the bottom.

***If the bike has gears, make sure the bike is in a good gear for starting.

Power Pedal Position



Step 7 Add Second Pedal

Once Starting with Pedal is mastered, it's time to add the second pedal.

Start with starting foot on pedal as in Step 6, but when coasting, rest other foot on second pedal. The rider needs to find the pedal with their foot (without looking down).

When stopping, step off the second pedal toward the handlebars.

Step 8 Pedaling

Often riders will start pedaling automatically in Step 7, but if the rider doesn't, it's helpful to go through a couple of steps.

When coasting with the starting foot down, the starting pedal needs to go a bit further than straight down so that the next pedal is at a point where when it is pushed down it will move the bike forward. (like the starting pedal start position only for the other pedal)

Step 8 Stopping

Stopping has 4 steps:

- Stop pedaling
- Place starting foot in coasting position (pedal straight down)
- After the bike slows down a bit, apply the brakes, usually right brake only
- Once the bike has stopped, non-starting foot should be getting ready to step off the pedal onto the ground (stepping toward the front of the bike). *** If bike has coaster brakes, coast with non-starting foot in down position

Once Starting / Pedaling / Stopping has been learned, lots of practice is needed to make Starting/Stopping second nature. Note: Once rider starts pedaling they don't want to practice stopping!!

Stopping and Starting (video)

<https://youtu.be/O42KZ3db9kM> - from Local Motion,
Burlington, VT

Step 9 Turning

Practice turning in a quiet parking lot

Once the rider has more speed, they will need to slow down prior to making turns, coast through the turns and then pedal out of the turns. (a new concept for riders who have just learned how to ride).

Step 10 Rough Roads

Practice coasting over rough spots in the roads and lifting off the seat just a bit. With one pedal at down position, just straighten that leg a bit to lift off the seat.

Step 11 Raising Seat

Once the rider is more comfortable with riding, it's time to start to move the seat to proper height. Proper height is having a slight bend in the leg with on the seat and the pedal is in the lowest position.

Gradually raise the seat.

Practice starting when off the seat, rather than in a seated position. This is easier - uses body weight to push the pedal, allows greater leg extension for more power in pedal strokes, less wobbly pedaling because the legs don't have to bend as much in the pedal stroke.

Raising the seat



Step 12 Stopping / Starting

Not every start will be on a slight downhill

Practice getting ready to start again after stopping at an intersection, stop sign, stop light.

Knowing when to stop the session

Look for early signs of frustration and give lots of praise.

As new steps are added, sometimes it's two steps forward, 1 step back. Go back and reinforce what the rider already knows how to do to get their confidence back.

Celebrate small victories.

Limit session to 30 minutes at a time (unless progressing really well).

Additional tips - walking bike (gradually lifting feet longer), bigger downhill for more speed).

Additional resources

Learn-to-Ride Classes for Youth & Adults www.bgindy.com/for/Learntoride

One-on-One Bike Riding Lessons www.bgindy.com/for/StreetWise

<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/teach-child-to-ride-a-bike.html>

<https://www.bicycling.com/skills-tips/a20032688/never-make-these-7-mistakes-when-teaching-someone-to-ride/>

<https://www.liv-cycling.com/global/campaigns/9-tips-for-teaching-anxious-kids-to-bike/20113>

Additional Resources (cont.)

Link to a video I've found that outlines the method I use to teach people how to ride bicycles <https://www.bicycleridingschool.org/teach-yourselfother-teachers.html>

Here's the link to the presentation I viewed from Bicycle Colorado:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zQ8I4ONL0f5PT_rOAPs_m34rhu0vuobd/view?usp=sharing

How to learn to ride a bicycle as an adult (from REI):

<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/how-to-learn-to-ride-a-bike-as-an-adult.html>

Some videos and resources to develop handling skills:

<https://www.facebook.com/BuddyPegs/videos/344751016484534/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoZlcAqQ9Eo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egiZlt3dzjY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4rL7m2NLVw>

[Danish Cycling Federation 20 Cycling Games](#)