

How to Teach a Child to Ride a Bike

There's no right or perfect age to learn to ride a bike. Learning to ride a bike depends on a child's physical and mental development.

The method outlined here is only one approach to teaching bike riding, and every rider proceeds at their own pace.



- **Your child will need a properly fitted helmet and properly sized bike.** Check the bike to make sure that it is in good working order and safe. If you are unsure about safety or fit, take the bike to a bike shop to have it checked.
- **First, remove the pedals/training wheels and lower the seat so they can sit on the seat and touch the ground flat footed.** The goal is to help them feel more comfortable and steadier as they begin to learn to glide and balance.
- **Next, get them to glide and balance!** Find a **VERY** gentle slope. The goal is to get them to push themselves to get enough momentum to glide/balance with feet up and off the ground for about 10 feet at a time. As they practice gliding and balancing, encourage them to look forward rather than down at their feet. Continue until they are able to glide/balance, with feet up, for 20 – 30 feet.
- **Stopping, Part 1:** While gliding and balancing kids are not going too fast. They can stop by putting both feet down on the ground and using their feet as their brakes.
- **Steering and Turning While Gliding:** If the child is ready, have them practice turning and steering. Have them try big, easy looping turns. If the child is not ready, they can try once they learn to pedal.
- **Stopping, Part 2:** For coaster brakes, hold the bike while they're on it and have them practice gently pressing on the coaster brakes until they can use them without wobbling very much. For hand brakes, have the child walk alongside the bike holding the handgrips with a couple of fingers on the brakes. Have them use the hand brakes to slow the bike as they walk along it. If the child is not comfortable with this, they can use their feet as brakes if they are pedaling slowly.
- **Pedaling:** Once the child can glide on the bike with feet up it's time to put the pedals back on the bike. For now, keep the seat in its lowered position so your child can still put both feet on the ground to stop. To help them, hold the handlebars as you face the child that is seated on the bike. Have them practice gliding, picking up their feet and "finding" the pedals while looking at you or looking ahead. Once they are ready, have them do this independently.
- **The "pedal power push".** After a child has mastered gliding and finding pedals, the "pedal power push" comes next. Determine which foot they will want to start with on the pedal and which one they want to push off with (it's also okay to use either foot). Take the pedal associated with that foot and position it at the top of its downward side of the pedal stroke (up and in front)*, then put the foot up and on that pedal, meanwhile the other foot is on the ground to push off. Have them push off the ground and push down with the pedal foot at the same time – all the while looking up and in front of them – then allow the pushing foot to "find" the pedal while keeping their eyes up and in front of them.
- **Raise the seat incrementally.** Usually a child will pedal **MORE** easily with the seat up because as the seat height increases their knees have more space and their control of the bike is better. Proper seat height is when the rider is sitting on the seat and can only touch the ground with tippy toes. They can lean the bike to the side to be able to have one foot flat on the ground and rest comfortably.