

Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Riding a Bike

Children learn to ride a bike at various ages however for some children it can be more difficult. Here are some examples of children who may need support:



- Children with delayed motor skills
- Children with co-ordination or motor-planning difficulties
- Children with low muscle tone or altered muscle tone

The below tips will help you to support a child to have fun and be a safe cyclist;

Strategies to support the child in developing this skill

- Make sure your child has a well-fitting helmet, teach them to how to put it on independently (it helps to first practise fastening and unfastening the buckle before putting it on).
- Set the seat height so it is right for your child; their feet should be flat on the ground when seated.
- Giving your child experience of riding a tag-along behind your bike will help with learning the reciprocal action for pedalling.
- Rather than using stabilisers, it is strongly recommended that you remove the pedals (and stabilisers if you have them) from the bike so that your child can learn to balance by scooting along using their feet to push against the ground. This way you are breaking the task down for your child, who is learning to balance as a separate skill from learning to pedal. Later, learning to manage this over slightly uneven ground will be good practise.
- Before your child learns to cycle, teach them to walk along in a straight line whilst holding onto the handle- bars, with the bike on their right-hand side. When they can do this, teach them to use both brakes to stop the bike suddenly on command.
- Whilst still walking beside the bike and not yet riding on it, teach your child how to turn corners (using plenty of space). This will help them begin to learn how to handle and steer the bike, and how the weight of the bike is distributed and managed. Also, being able to walk the bike to the park or other safe area in which to learn to ride will be very helpful.

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- Whilst scooting along and building balance skills, repeat the same stages of learning as before when learning to walk beside the bike – first learn to go in straight lines and to use the brakes well, and then to turn corners.
- Teach your child how to pick the bike up when it is lying on the ground. Inevitably they will need to do this at times, and again, this will help them learn how to manage the bike's weight.
- When your child is confidently managing all this, it is time to put the pedals back on.
- Teach your child to kick the pedals into position ready for push off, with their preferred foot just forward of the highest position to get good leverage. The effort of pushing the pedals round, especially for push-off, will make balancing much harder. Keep the bike in a low gear. A tarmac path will give much less resistance than grass.
- You, or another fit adult, will need to hold the back of the seat to give some help with balance at first as the child gets used to pedalling whilst balancing. Two adults, one each side, is best. If your child really struggles with balance, it will be safer and easier to use a handling belt. These can be fairly expensive, but are sometime available second-hand (check for wear).
- Again, repeat the same stages of learning as when scooting – first learning to go in straight lines and to use the brakes. To gain balance, longer stretches of space are helpful.
- Balancing while pushing off and turning corners is much harder. You will gradually feel your child managing to balance without your help. A grassy area may be safer for first attempts to 'go it alone'.