

Dear Parent,

To my mind, teaching a child to ride a bike is one of the defining moments of being a parent. It creates such fond memories for both you and your children and is likely to be your child's first taste of freedom and independence. Cycling also equips children with an invaluable skill for life. To name but a few benefits, it is a cheap and 'green' way to get around, it's great fun, gets them away from the TV and out into the fresh air, encourages social skills and has major health benefits.

However, as a parent of three children myself I do understand that you may have concerns about safety – particularly with on-road cycling. If you do have doubts, then you're not alone. A recent report from Cycling England revealed that 8 out of 10 parents (81%) ban children from cycling alone.



As an ardent road safety campaigner, I can't deny that road cycling does carry risks. However, if you follow a few simple safety rules, it is possible for young people to cycle independently and safely. I also feel strongly that if I hadn't been allowed the freedom to ride as a child, I would not have become one of UK's most successful cyclists - or more importantly, learned to love the simple pleasure of getting on my bike for a ride.

So, to help you get you and your family started on the 'right track', I've put together the following guide.

Happy Cycling!

Tony Doyle, MBE

World Champion Cyclist and Ambassador for Pedalite International Ltd

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Getting Kids In The Saddle

My advice would be to encourage children to learn to ride from as young as possible. Children have a fantastic ability to learn new skills – and they usually have the energy and enthusiasm too!

So, where's the best place to get started?

- ❖ If your child is riding a bike for the first time, the first 'rule' is to make sure that it is the right fit. If you're 'handing-down' a bike from an older brother or sister, it's really important that you check that the handle bars and the seat are in best position and the overall height of the bike suits your 'young rider'. If you're not sure, I would strongly advise that you visit a specialist retailer.
- ❖ If you're buying a new bike, go to an established retailer in your area. A specialist will ensure that you get a good service and be on hand to offer advice and ongoing support / maintenance

Safety first – even in the Summer!

As well as a good quality bike, it is also advisable for your child to have:

- ❖ a safety-standard helmet even for short distances. And don't forget, adults need one too!
- ❖ Bright, reflective clothing – remember the adage, Be Seen, Be Safe
- ❖ additional lighting fitted - for example Pedalite 360 visibility, battery-free flashing pedal lights that ensure you can be seen any time day or night

I'd urge you to follow these safety measures – even in the Summer months. The UK's unpredictable weather means that it can get dim or even dark very quickly – even in the middle of the day. Research suggests that 3 out of 4 cycling accidents are at road junctions where cyclists need be seen from the side¹. So, side visibility and side lighting are a must for all cyclists so that they can be clearly seen by motorists at road junctions.

So – you've got the bike – what now?

Before your child can start riding, I recommend that you:

- ❖ Pump up the tyres and make sure the brakes are in working order
- ❖ Get the bike serviced – it will last longer if it is maintained
- ❖ Prolong your bike's life by parking it out of the elements whenever possible.
- ❖ Encourage your child to look after their own bike (e.g. regular cleaning) – it will give them a sense of pride and responsibility for riding

Most children learn to ride over a period of time. You'll probably start out in the back garden, with mum or dad holding onto the back seat, before letting your little one 'go' for the first time, before graduating to laps around the local park. This is a great way for your child to learn – giving them the security and confidence they need to ride independently. It's also an activity that all the family can enjoy together..

I would also strongly suggest that you enroll them in the new government cycling proficiency scheme, **Bikeability**. This will ensure that your child receives training on the bike and acquires a good understanding of road safety. It will also give you, as a parent, peace of mind that your child is safe, well-equipped and confident to ride! Courses are often offered through schools or the local council. With a great website it couldn't be easier to find out more www.bikeability.org.uk .

Get riding!

We're spoilt for choice in the UK for beautiful places to enjoy cycling. Here are some of my favourite places for a great family day out – put the bikes in the car, get your gear together, pack drinks (preferably water) to keep everyone hydrated and a picnic to 're-fuel' on energy, and get out there...

1. Windsor Great Park, Berkshire
2. Richmond Park, Surrey
3. Rutland Water, Leicestershire
4. Hyde Park, London
5. Finally you don't have to make it a special day out just ditch the car and cycle with the kids to school, imagine what a buzz you and they will get from a boring journey becoming fun and healthy!

For more help for you and the kids why not check out some useful websites;

www.everydaycycling.com

www.sustrans.org.uk (over 12,000 miles of traffic-free, quiet lanes and on-road walking and cycling in the UK) or

www.thenationabyway.org (an organisation currently developing a 4,500 mile sign-posted cycling route around England and parts of Scotland and Wales) to get some fresh ideas on the best cycle tracks and pathways.

www.bikeforall.net

www.cyclingengland.co.uk

www.hedgehogs.gov.uk

References: 1. Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents