

Tykes 'N Bikes

Kids love their bicycles. However, that affinity does not change the fact that about 250 children are killed and more than 350,000 children go to emergency rooms each year due to bicycle injuries, more than any other sport. Bikes are associated with more childhood injuries than any other consumer product other than automobiles. To keep the joy in biking for your child take the time to share a few simple safety rules with them.



No Helmet, No Bicycle

Bike helmets reduce the risk of serious head injury by 85 percent. According to the Children's National Medical Center, universal use of bicycle helmets by children ages 4 to 15 would prevent between 135 and 155 deaths and between 39,000 and 45,000 head injuries each year.

Keep this in mind: If parents wear helmets when they bicycle, about 98 percent of kids wear them, too. If parents don't wear helmets, the number drops considerably. Let your child participate in the selection of the helmet to assure a proper fit. Do not buy one that a child can "grow into." A helmet should have a snug, but comfortable fit. It should have a chin strap and buckles that will stay securely fastened. A properly adjusted helmet covers both the front and back areas of the head. Never buy a used helmet. Do not use a helmet that has been dropped, or involved in a collision, or has a crack in it. Beginning in March, 1999, all helmets manufactured or imported for sale must meet a uniform Consumer Product Safety Commission standard. Look for the certification. However, helmets that meet ASTM, ANSI or SNELL standards provide adequate protection.

Finding The Right Bicycle

Choose a bicycle that fits the child's size today, not one she will grow into later. The bike should fit the rider's ability and kind of riding. To be sure your child's bike is the right size:

- Sitting on the seat with hands on the handlebar, your child must be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground.
- Straddling the center bar, he should be able to keep both feet flat on the ground with about 1" clearance between the crotch and the bar.
- When buying a bike with hand brakes, be sure the child can comfortably grasp the brakes and apply sufficient pressure to stop the bike. Under ages 6-7, buy a bike

- with foot brakes.
- Look for rubber-treated pedals, or metal pedals with serrated rattrap edges. Avoid plastic pedals.
- Don't get a bike with gears for a small child.

Rules To Ride By

Almost every police station has information on bicycle safety. Take the course with your child. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that under age 8, children should ride with adult supervision and off the street. The decision to allow older children on the street depends on traffic patterns and individual maturity.

As it starts to get darker, your child's safety can be improved by wearing light colored clothing, including a brightly colored helmet. Wear close fitting clothing to avoid getting caught in moving parts and discourage the use of headphones as they hinder your ability to hear the traffic around you.

When riding, ride on the far right and travel with the flow of traffic. It is never safe to ride against traffic. Strongly encourage your children to obey the traffic laws; stop at stop signs and red lights. Ride defensively by being predictable, signal when making a turn. Let motorists know what you are doing by using proper hand signals. Don't ride too close to parked cars. The driver may open his door in your path. Leave at least 3 feet between you and parked cars. Finally, encourage your kids to have fun, but not by clowning around. Never hitch a ride on a moving vehicle or do stunts or wheelies on a road with cars and trucks.

Alyssa,

I thought this was a good article. What are your thoughts? Can you put this somewhere and ref it in the article.

Who is with my Child?

Have you ever experienced a situation that caused your heart to quickly race and your mind to think of a thousand things at once? Has your child ever not returned from school or the bus stop? Well, if you are a caring parent and that happened to you, I believe you might have felt the way I did.

While living in Florida, our 5-year-old son didn't come home from the bus stop. Yes, it was my fault because I wasn't there waiting for him. I had just put our little girl in her stroller and was heading out of the garage to meet him. My wife pulled into the driveway and asked if our son was home. I told her I was just going to get him. It was obvious she didn't see him walking home with the other children.

Our house was only one block from the bus stop. It would take a child of 5 about 2 minutes to walk from the bus stop to our house. My wife and I immediately raced the one block to the bus stop, asking the other children along the way if they saw our son. None of them had. We then raced around the neighborhood looking for him and knocking on doors. He was no where to be found. No one knew where he was. As a concerned parent, the worst thoughts raced threw my head.

My wife and I made one more trip to the bus stop before we knew we had to call the police. Our son came walking around the corner with another little boy. The mixed emotions came shooting through. I was overjoyed. I was angry. I was upset with myself for not being at the bus stop when he came home. Most of all, I hugged him.

We asked him where he was. He told us some teenagers asked him to come in the woods to see their fort. We went home and talked about it further. I asked my son to take me to the fort. He was scared and didn't want to go back there. We asked why and he wouldn't answer. Again my heart raced. I feared the worst. I told my son we have to go back so I can see where it was. He refused. We finally convinced him it was all right.

We started walking to the fort. As we turned the corner, my son said, "Those are the teenagers that took us to their fort". He was pointing to a group of kids down the road on bikes. The teenagers saw us and immediately took off. I was sure we had a problem at this point. I raced home with our son and left him off with his mom. I jumped on my bike and rode around the neighborhood.

I caught up with the teenagers in front of a policeman's house. He saw us and came out. He asked what was going on. I explained to him what had happened. The teenagers said they just wanted to get money off the boys. When I said I wanted to take them home and

talk to each of their parents, all the excuses came in from, "My parents sleep during the day because they work at night," to "My parents don't come home until late at night". The policeman released the boys and told me the history about these kids. With lack of parental guidance, these boys basically did what they wanted.

I was very lucky on several accounts as you can imagine. Don't let my fears of that event come true in your life. There are things you can do to make sure you are more aware of your child's whereabouts. You can arm your child with information that will help you both.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I know who my child's friends are?
2. Have I met the parents of my child's friends?
3. Do I authorize my child to go into a friend's house even though I haven't met their parents?

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