



Sustaining Dunbar

Travel Advice Fact Sheet 4 - Learning to Cycle



Learning to ride a bike involves two things, learning to balance and learning to pedal. When teaching their child to cycle, many parents go down the stabiliser route, taking them off when the child had gained confidence and then holding onto the saddle while they learn to balance. Although this is the traditional way, it is suggested that you forget the stabilisers and remove the pedals instead (or ask your local bike shop to do it).

The following description of this method is taken from a very good website for beginner and returning cyclists, www.whycycle.co.uk, and works for adults too.

- Choose a suitable place to learn; a large open area, quiet and flat. Tarmac or grass is ok, although grass is more uneven and harder work
- Lower the saddle to a point where, when sat on the saddle, the feet are rested FLAT FOOTED on the ground and with the knees slightly bent. Ask the rider to walk whilst remaining sat on the saddle. It might look a little wobbly at first but this bit is easily done. Suggest that the rider try to keep as straight a line as possible.
- Keep going back and forth down the same straight line, gradually, asking them to walk a little faster and taking longer strides each time.
This stage is a bit like the difference between running and walking. When you walk, you have always got at least one foot on the ground, but as you get faster and start to run, you will get to a point where you have neither foot on the ground. Running whilst sat on the bike leads to us "scooting".
- Once we have periods where neither foot is on the ground, our balance instinct kicks in and without realising we are doing it, we make minute adjustments to our body weight to maintain our upright position: we balance. Because we haven't got to worry about pedalling, we are free to concentrate on balancing.
With a little practice, the vast majority of kids (and adults) can find their balance within an hour and many in just a few minutes.
- Keep practising... introducing corners into the track.
Stopping is easiest done by dragging your feet on the ground and kids find this really easy to do so don't set them learning in their best shoes!
Once confident running along on the bike like this, suggest lifting both feet off the ground and seeing how far they can go without touching the ground. With kids, the bike can easily be left like this, with no pedals, for quite some time.
- Reinststate the pedals. Once the balance has been mastered, we can add the pedals back. You will be surprised just how easy the pedalling action is once we no longer have to "think" about balancing the bike. If necessary, get them to scoot along by foot on the ground method first, and then keep themselves going with the pedals.

- Average learning times - kids usually grasp the balance concept within an hour. Once the balance is mastered, don't rush to put the pedals on straight away.
- You don't have to use anything special to learn using the pedal-less method. There are some manufacturers who make bikes with no pedals specifically for this method, although they can be quite expensive.

Safety and Basic Cycling Rules

Mutual respect and consideration for other road users and pedestrians will make travel more enjoyable and safer. Using your bike bell and friendly greetings will make a big difference.

- Be considerate to all road users and pedestrians; let walkers know you're behind them with a friendly bell or "excuse me", and say thank you when they move for you. Leave as much space as possible when passing, it is usual to pass on the right, and take care when passing small children and dogs; they don't always do what you expect.
- Ride well clear of the kerb, to avoid potholes and drains. This will also make you more visible at junctions. Ride a straight line past parked cars rather than dodging between them. Be careful near lorries and buses, they may not be able to see you very well.
- Make sure your bike is in good working order before you set off; brakes should be working well and tyres pumped up and make sure lights are working and reflectors are clean.

Useful Websites

www.sustainingdunbar.org - lots of useful information about sustainable travel.