

Fitting Your Child's Bike Helmet

Making sure your child's bicycle helmet fits correctly and the straps are in the right place:

Forehead

The front edge of the helmet should be the width of 2 fingers above the eyebrows.

Ears

The side straps should form a 'V' just below the earlobes.

Chin

You should be able to fit just one finger under the chin strap. Then it is tight enough. Over 90 per cent of children age six to 16 ride bicycles. Children start cycling as play when they are very young. As they grow older and become more experienced, the transition from toy to transportation is made. With increasing independence, parents have less control of where the bicycle is ridden and how it is used.

The attitudes you as a parent instill in your children from a young age will determine how they will ride for years to come.

Starting out

Make sure your child's bike and helmet are the right size. He or she should be able to straddle the bike with both feet on the ground; a bike that is too big or too small is a safety hazard. As a minimum, your child's first bike should be equipped with a bell and reflectors.

For young children, set the following hard and fast rules:

- No playing on the road.
- No riding on busy streets.
- No riding at night.
- Stop for all stop signs.
- Ride on the right with traffic.
- Make your own decisions

The majority of bicycle injuries do not involve motor vehicles. Most are falls, collisions with stationary objects, and collisions with other bikes or pedestrians result from the bicyclist losing control, and most occur less than five blocks from home, in familiar surroundings.

But the most serious incidents - including over 95 per cent of cyclist deaths - involve motor vehicles. In 70 per cent of the collisions, the cyclist is at fault, either by violating a law or by poor road sense. Teach your children as if their life depended on the lessons. It does.

The following are some of the most common causes of bicycle injuries:

Driveway rideout

A youngster rides out of the driveway and gets hit by a car. Very often these incidents involve younger children: the median age is less than 10. Does your driveway present obstructions to the view of passing motorists, such as bushes or trees? If so, trim them back. Most importantly, teach your child about driveway safety. Go outside to the driveway and have him or her practice the following steps:

- Stop before entering the street.
- Scan left, then right for traffic.
- If there's no traffic, proceed into the roadway.

Running the stop sign

Most cyclists who get hit riding through stop signs know that they are supposed to stop. They just don't see why, or they get distracted. Impress on your child that, while he or she may not get hit every time, running stop signs is very dangerous. Take your child to a stop sign and explain what it means, emphasizing the following:

- Stop at all stop signs regardless of what is happening.
- Scan both directions for traffic.
- Wait for any cross traffic to clear.
- Proceed when safe.

After dark

Most crashes in which a car coming up from the rear hits a bike while overtaking happen at night. These overtaking accidents can be serious. Most, however, involve older cyclists; the median age is about 20. For adults and teenagers, the first requirement is to be visible: use bright lights and reflectors, and wear light-colored clothes with reflective tape.

Following the leader

Teach your child always to assess the traffic situation for him or herself. When a group is riding around, each cyclist should stop for stop signs. Each one should scan to the rear before making left turns.

Head Injuries

Less than 20 per cent of reported bicycle injuries involve collisions with cars. Most occur in falls, or as a result of riders losing control. A bad fall can result from a skid, catching a wheel in a crack or even getting a shoelace caught in the chain.

In a spill, the forehead usually hits the ground first. Head injuries cause most bicycle-related deaths and can result in serious injury such as brain damage. Up to 85 per cent of serious head injuries could be prevented by wearing a helmet.

Insist your child always wears a helmet when riding. (It goes without saying that parents must set an example by always wearing theirs when cycling.) Remember, a helmet only works when you wear it!

Never forget that example is the best teacher.

- Get into the helmet habit.
- Always stop at stop signs.
- Practise what you teach.
- Tips for Safe Kids

Teach your children the "5 Steps to Safely Crossing the Street."

1. Stop
2. Look both ways

3. Listen for traffic
4. Wait until street is clear and all traffic has stopped
5. Make eye contact with drivers to be sure they see you

Know the stopping zones. Children should stop at driveways, alleys and areas without curbs. They should never run out onto the street.

Under nine? Don't cross alone. Children under age nine should be accompanied by an adult or an older child when crossing the street.

To cross or not to cross. Children should recognize pedestrian crossing signals but not rely on them. Remind them to make sure traffic has stopped and to make eye contact with drivers before crossing. They should be taught to respect the role of the crossing guard and to understand his/her signals. Important: Remind them to continue across if the light changes to "Don't Walk" while they are in the crosswalk.

Sidewalks are safest. Teach children to always walk on the sidewalk. In areas without sidewalks, teach them to walk as far away from traffic as they can and to walk facing approaching traffic.

Stay away from parked cars. Teach children about the dangers of crossing the street between parked cars or when not at a corner. Children should cross only at corners or pedestrian crosswalks.

Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association supports the Chilliwack Safety Village in their efforts to teach the children in School District #33 about First Aid, Fire Safety, Stranger Danger, Bicycle Safety (including wearing a helmet properly) and Pedestrian Safety. Every year about 4000 students go through the Safety Village learning ways to keep safe and have fun. The pictures on this page are from the April session at the Chilliwack Safety Village.

Pedestrian Safety for Children

Did You Know?

- Approximately 115 children die each year due to pedestrian injuries.
- Close to 1,800 Canadian children and youths are hospitalized each year due to pedestrian injuries.
- 5-9 year olds have a higher rate of death and hospitalization than other age groups: because children spend increasing amounts of time as pedestrians and accordingly, the rates of injury and death peak in this range; and children's exposure suddenly increases when their road skills are still deficient and they lack the judgment to make good decisions on their own.