



Learn to Ride Strategies

for teaching your student to ride a bike



For students in grades K-3 this process will be a little more challenging due the stage of development and their gross motor coordination. **For student in grades 4 and up** the process will be more effective. I encourage you to work with your student as soon as they are ready to learn which is as soon as they show interest. For students in grades 4 and up, I do not recommend removing pedals. For younger students, I recommend trying without removing pedals and be prepared to remove pedals if they are in the way of your student gliding as the instructions explain.

You need to have a bike for them to ride that fits them and is in good working condition. A bike that fits should have plenty of space for them to pedal with their knees having plenty of space and the ability to have the seat low enough so that they can be flat footed. Check the bike over to make sure that it is in good working order and safe. If you are unsure take the bike to a bike shop to have it checked.

Focus on positive encouragement and make corrections gently. Kids want to be successful! There is no specific timeline for learning to ride a bike, each youth will progress on their own timeline. Do not try to minimize their fear, acknowledge it, tell them you believe they can and will be able to do this in time and continue provide lots of positive encouragement for their progress.

•**First lower the seat so they can sit on the seat and touch the ground flat footed.** This will help them getting started and give just a bit more confidence and feeling of control to kids who are afraid of falling over.

•**Next get them familiar with using hand brakes if they have them.** If they have pedal brakes, getting used to braking will be a process once they are pedaling and you will need to keep in mind that they are not using the brakes during the early part learning process and you will need to be ready to catch them. If they have hand brakes, discourage them from using their feet to stop and encourage to use the brakes. Show them how much faster they can stop using the brakes instead of their feet. You can sit on the bike to show this and then have them try it and let them see how it is more effective.

•**Push and glide skills practice is next!** Find a VERY gentle slope, barely a slope at all! It is important to have them push with both feet together (frog or bunny hops) and NOT in a walking motion. Otherwise they just move from one foot to the other and do not get the feeling of balancing. The goal is to get them to push and then lift their feet and glide with feet up and off the ground for about 10 feet at a time. Keep encouraging ALL of their progress and remind them to keep their eyes up and looking where they are going and not down at the bike (you can walk in front of them to provide something to look at). Share with them that this gliding action engages their core. You can put your hands on your belly to show them your core and encourage them to tighten muscles in their belly/core.

•**Continue pushing and gliding until they are going with feet up for 20 – 30 feet; turn gently while gliding; and use their brakes to stop (if they have hand brakes).** Tell them that the turning motion is very gentle. Get on their bike and demonstrate how a VERY slight turn of the handlebars will turn the bike. Have them practice more!

•**It is time to try pedaling.** Once they seem to have gotten comfortable balancing, gliding and stopping with their handbrakes. The key to starting to pedal is to get them to start by gliding and then have their feet “find” the pedals without them looking down. You will have to work hard at this point to keep them looking up and in front of them (running backwards in front of them or standing farther ahead in front of them is a good technique or give them a point in front of the to look at). Note: Be careful not go to pedaling too quickly, if they are not balancing than pedaling will be difficult, it can be hard to backtrack from trying to pedal once started (although it can be done). Some kids may not want to try the pedals when you first ask, in that case just let them go at their own pace and keep encouraging and celebrating their success. Learners with pedal back brakes only, now is the time to start having them practice using their brakes. Have them get going, pedal and ride and then pedal backwards hard and stop.

•**Once they can get going by gliding and finding pedals, show them the “pedal power push”.** Determine which foot they will want to start with on the pedal and which one they want to push off with (if determining that is difficult then let they use either foot, becoming ambidextrous on this task is a good skill), take the pedal associated with that foot and position it at the top of its downward side of the pedal stroke (up and in front)*, then put the foot up and on that pedal, meanwhile the other foot is on the ground to push off. Have them push off the ground and push down with the pedal foot at the same time – all the while looking up and in front of them – then allow the pushing foot to “find” the pedal while keeping their eyes up and in front of them. Note: this is more difficult with pedal back brakes. You will need to lift the back of the bike to get the pedal positioned.

•**Raise the seat incrementally.** Once they are pedaling consistently, tell the learner you are going to raise the seat a very small amount at a time so they can get comfortable each time. Raise the seat about a centimeter at a time. Let become as comfortable as they were before you raised the seat, then raise it again. (Sometimes you can raise it a little more than a centimeter, just do not overdo it.) Usually they will pedal MORE easily with the seat up because as the seat height increases their knees have more space and their control of the bike is better. Proper seat height is with rider is sitting on the seat rider can only touch the ground with tippy toes. Teach them they can lean the bike to the side to be able to have one foot flat on the ground and rest comfortably.

These steps you work to teach most kids to ride a bike. There is no specific time frame when they “should” get these skills. Some kids learn in 5 minutes, some try for hours and only get it after many hours of practice. DO NOT hold the student up while they pedal the bikes. You can hold them steady and still while they put feet on the pedals to feel what that feels like. Holding the bike while they pedal is both uncomfortable for you and harder for the student to learn as it does not teach the valuable skill of balance on the bike. Check in with the learner regularly, praise them often and take breaks if necessary. If they are getting tired, take a break. Sometimes asking how they are doing when you notice they are getting tired and suggesting a number of times to repeat the drill, “Are you getting tired? Do you want to do this 5 (or 3 depending on how tired) more times and take a break?” can be helpful to go just a little longer. If you give them the option to choose how much longer to go they feel empowered. **Most importantly have fun and keep it positive!**