

Parents

How to Teach Your Kid to Ride a Bike

When your kid wants to ride without training wheels, help him make the upgrade.

By Rebecca Sullivan Delaney from [Parents Magazine](#)



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My 5-year-old son was begging me to take the training wheels off his bike, and I kept stalling. The prospect intimidated me, but after a few days of constant nagging, I finally relented. My stomach lurched when he wobbled to the left, then wobbled to the right, and fell, skidding across the pavement.

Children are typically ready to learn how to ride without training wheels around age 5 or 6, says Susan McLucas, founder of the Bicycle Riding

School, in Somerville, Massachusetts. As with any activity, though, kids' readiness can vary. Follow these tips to ease the transition to big-kid biking.

Zero in on physical ability.

Even if your child asks to take her training wheels off, it's important to assess whether she can manage a two-wheeler. Watch how she performs other "non-bicycle" activities, such as skating, skiing, gymnastics, skateboarding, or scooter-riding to get a good sense of her balance and core strength, says Steven Finkelstein, founder of Professor Pedals, a riding school in Syosset, New York. Your child must also be mature enough to understand the rules of traffic. If she can't cross the street on her own yet, make sure that she knows to stay on the sidewalk or in a park before you get her riding.

Scope out a good practice space.

Once you unscrew those pesky training wheels, find a quiet, open area to start riding. "Kids need to have room to swerve and get their balance," McLucas says. "The bike will tell him where to go at first and he'll need to turn the way it leans." If you're nervous about having him ride on pavement, look for a park with a gentle, grassy slope away from parked cars, playground equipment, and rough bushes that may block his path. Here, your child can get a feel for how the bike moves and can learn how to steer.

Build one skill at a time.

You may need to lower the seat for your initial practice sessions. Your child should be able to place her feet flat on the ground when she's sitting on the bike's seat. Show her how to get on and off her bike by standing on the side and then swinging her leg over the back wheel. Then make sure she knows where the brakes are and how to use them. When she's ready to try riding, have her "scoot" on flat ground to practice balance. "While she's seated on the bicycle, have your child walk it and try to raise both feet off the ground for a few seconds, slowly increasing the duration," Finkelstein says. "When she's ready, incorporate pedaling into the process." Stay by her side and put one hand on her upper back and the other on her arm to help her steer. (Resist holding the back of the bike seat -- it can hamper your child's balance and even injure you in the process.) As she develops balance and more control, loosen your grip on her but stay close in case she needs your help again.

Know when to call it quits.

Keep your child's initial learning session to a manageable length, no more than 60 minutes, experts say. At the first sign of fatigue -- flagging energy, whining, maybe a few tears -- take a break for the day. My son was concentrating so hard on learning how to balance, pedal, and brake that he pooped out after ten minutes. Instead of ending the lesson when your kid is crying and you're screaming, call it quits after a positive moment, such as a longer "scoot" without falling over.

If your child has a frustrating day but still seems ready to learn, try again tomorrow or the next day. "If he doesn't make progress toward being able to control the bike on his own within three sessions, take a break for a couple of weeks or even a month and then come back to it," suggests Finkelstein. Some kids have the necessary coordination and balance earlier than others. In the meantime, encourage him to focus on other ways to improve his balance like riding a scooter or swinging. Pay attention to any cues that he may want to try learning again. If he's talking about his bike or mentioning that his friends are riding, he may be ready to give it another go.

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