

Buying a bike for children.

Congratulations on deciding to get the child in your life riding. Choosing the right bike can be daunting. How do you strike the right balance between safety and fun?

Here are our tips to buying a child's first bike.

1. Bike style

Choosing the style of a child's first bike depends on their confidence, age and coordination.

A balance bike

Designed for children 18 months to 3 years, they have no pedals and move when the child pushes with their feet. These bikes teach balance, movement and steering without having to coordinate pedals and brakes.

A bike with training wheels

Designed for children 2 and up who have developed better balance and motor skills. Children will need to pedal to make the bike move, but training wheels provide support to keep the bike upright. The training wheels can be removed when your child can balance by themselves.

A standard two wheel push bike

For children who have developed the confidence and skill to ride a bike without training wheels. This level varies from child to child but is usually around five.

2. Size

Once you have chosen the right style of bike, it's time to choose the right size. Below is the recommended wheel size, based on age and height.

Wheel Size	Age	Height
12"	2-3	85-100 cm
14"	3-4	95-110 cm
16"	4-5	110-120 cm
20"	5-8	120-135 cm
24"	8-11	135-145 cm
26"	11+	145+ cm

We recommend you take the child for a test ride first, and most bike stores are happy to help.

The bike should not be too big or too small. The child should be able to:

- straddle the middle of the upright bike with their feet flat on the ground, with a clearance of around five centimetres.
- not hit their knees or legs on the handlebars when riding. Their legs should have a slight bend when the pedal is at its closest point to the ground.
- to completely turn the handlebars left and right without being overstretched.

As the child grows, the adjustability of the bike seat and handlebars will ensure the bike can be used for longer.

3. Gears

One gear is the standard for children's bikes. As they develop and the bike increases in complexity more gears will be added to the bike.

4. Tyres

Depending on where your child will be riding, the tyres will be different.

For new riders we recommend tyres with more tread, as they can handle rough terrain better i.e. grass. Tyres with little tread are better for sealed environments i.e. roads, footpaths etc.

5. Brakes

There are 2 main types of brakes that are common on children's bikes.

Coaster – used when the child does not have the strength to activate the hand lever (usually up until 5 years). Used by pedalling backwards.

Hand Lever – once a child has the hand strength, bikes are more commonly fitted with a hand lever. Used by squeezing on the lever.

6. Safety equipment

It is Australian law that all bike riders must wear a helmet.

The main thing to remember is the 2 (adult) fingers rule. The helmet should sit 2 fingers above the eyebrows and you should be able to run 2 fingers under the chin strap. Also the triangles of your strap should sit underneath the ears.

You must also ensure that the bike is fitted with a working warning device i.e. a bell.

7. Price

The overall cost of the bike depends on its features and the material it is made from. Steel bikes are highly durable and can withstand most adventures children have, but they can be heavy.

Aluminium bikes, weigh less, are durable but more expensive.

Bicycle NSW recommends heading down to your local bike shop for advice on the right bike.



*Creating a better environment
for all bicycle riders*

Teaching a child how to ride a bike.

Teaching a child how to ride can be life changing and open up many doors for them. Remember, children learn by example so they may need you to show them first.

Follow our steps below:

1. The bike

Please see over the page on how to choose a bike.

2. The location

We recommend finding a traffic free, smooth, flat and wide location to teach. Paved areas away from cars are ideal – like paths in parks, tennis or basketball courts.

Grass is often thought to be the best for a soft landing (if the child falls over), but it is harder for the child to build up speed for balance.

Also, consider a location where the child will not feel embarrassed or distracted, if their friends appear.

3. Braking

Before the child starts to move, it is a good idea to teach them how to brake.

Coaster – used by pedalling backwards.

Hand Lever – used by squeezing on the lever.

4. The riding

Learning without pedals

Begin with the child, scooting on the bike so they can get the feeling of balance.

Once the child feels comfortable scooting, challenge them to lift their feet off the ground and coast.

To make learning to ride fun, we suggest asking the child to count to a certain number or sing a song, and see how far they get while coasting.

When scooting and coasting have become easier, it is time to teach them how to turn. We recommend placing cones out to steer the bike around.

Learning with pedals

Have the child stand over the bike, with one foot on the pedal in a 2 o'clock position and the other on the ground.

Encourage the child to push down on the pedal to get themselves moving – from there they should place their other foot on the pedal and continue pedalling. You should steady the child by touching their shoulders or bike seat. Do not grab hold – give some time for the child to get their balance by themselves. This will take some time to practice.

When the child feels comfortable with this skill, place cones out for the child to steer around. This will increase their balance and confidence in riding.

5. Stopping

Now that they know how to move forward and brake - it is time to put these skills together.

Using cones again, place them in a line for the child to brake at. Get them to try this drill until there is limited wobbling.

6. Have fun!

When they can ride, it is time to start cycling with them! We recommend short rides around the local park to start with.

Join our family for advocacy,
insurance and events.



Bicycle NSW is the peak advocacy body for bike riding across the state. We have proudly represented our members for over 40 years.

Our goal is to achieve a better environment for current riders, and for those who may be encouraged to ride a bicycle in the future. Bicycle NSW seeks to stimulate the cultural and behavioural change necessary to encourage bicycle use. We are also advocating for improvements to be made to the built environment that improve the viability of the bicycle as a serious transport option.

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