

Dear Parents,

Now is the time to teach your child safe bike *driving!* Bicycling is a great way for your family to have fun and exercise together. It's a sport to enjoy for one's entire lifetime. Bicycling can make a child more independent -- and you will feel more confident granting this independence when you know your child has learned to drive a bike safely.



- First, **set a good example** by riding on the right when on the street and by following all traffic laws -- which apply to bikes just as they do to cars. And, don't forget *your* helmet!
- Make sure your child has a bike that is in good working condition and that fits properly -- a bicycle is not something you should buy for the child to "grow into." Teach your child the **ABC Quick Check** -- that's "**A**ir (full tires), **B**rakes (working, and not rubbing), **C**hain and **C**rank -- and (tightened) **Q**uick release levers." A bike shop can help.
- Kids are not just small adults. They have a narrower field of vision, less ability to judge speed or distance, and may be impatient and impulsive. It's important to teach them the skills needed to **avoid the most common causes of crashes** -- and learning these skills takes practice.

Crash Cause	Way to Avoid
Coming out of a driveway and failing to yield to traffic	<i>Teach child to look LEFT, RIGHT, and LEFT again. Enter the roadway when nothing is coming.</i>
Failing to stop at stop sign	<i>Practice stopping; ride with your child and explain searching for traffic. BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL.</i>
Sudden left swerve -- into traffic	<i>Practice riding straight and "scanning" to the rear -- looking back to see if there is traffic.</i>
Riding on the wrong side of the street	<i>Ride on the RIGHT- it's safer and it's the law.</i>
Riding at night or in bad weather	<i>Children shouldn't ride at night. Anyone riding at night needs light colored clothes and lots of lights!</i>

Generally, younger children should start off riding on sidewalks. Teach your new cyclist to:

- Stop at **road crossings**. Look Left -- Right -- Left. Wait for cars. Then, take his or her turn alertly, paying attention to what the motorists are doing.
- Be aware that cars might turn into a driveway -- the driver may not look for bikes on sidewalks.
- Watch for clues that a car may soon be **backing out of a driveway**: engine noise, taillights on, exhaust smoke, driver in car, garage opening, cars hidden behind bushes or other cars. Many car drivers only look back -- not side-to-side -- until they are at the street.
- Speak up ("Bike passing" or "Excuse me") or sound a bell or horn **before passing someone**.

As kids mature and bike faster, sidewalk biking conflicts with cars worsen. Faster-moving bicyclists on sidewalks are harder for motorists to see than cyclists on the right side of the road. Studies have shown that sidewalk cyclists riding against traffic are much more likely to collide with cars than on-road riders going in the same direction as traffic. Very few bikes get hit from behind -- most adult car-bike crashes occur at intersections. As cyclists get faster, biking on many streets becomes safer than sidewalk riding.

When your child is ready, **practice road riding together** to teach skills such as: bicycling defensively, scanning around for traffic, looking back (and listening) for cars behind, proper lane positioning when turning (or going straight), hand signaling, and knowing where it is safe to ride for your child's skill level.



Alabama Bicycle Coalition at www.alabike.org

Many thanks to League of Illinois Bicyclists and Bicycle Coalition of Maine

For more detailed information, go to www.bikelib.org, under "Safety Education"