

Enable Ireland's Bicycle Skills Part 2: New Rider Cycling Skills

Once your child has learnt how to pedal their bike independently without stabilisers, there are 4 main skills to work on:

1. Balance
2. Braking
3. Cornering
4. Pedalling



Balancing

Once your child has learnt to ride their bike, they will probably want to keep cycling as fast as they can but in fact, learning to slow cycle is a great skill for developing further balance skills. You can set out an area with chalk lines on the ground and see how long you child can take from one side to the other with encouraging longer times each attempt. You can start to teach how to 'ratchet' the pedals by doing half turns to keep the bike moving forwards slowly. These skills will teach improved control of the bike.



As their balance skills improve, you can set out a narrow 'path' along the ground with parallel chalk lines and encourage your child to stay within the lines. As they improve, make the path narrower until it is just a single line.

Try also encouraging your child with the 'stationary bike' challenge. Draw out a 1m by 2m box and your child can slowly ride into the box. The game is to see how long they can stay within this box barely moving.

When learning to balance, encourage your child to keep looking up where they are going and keeping their arms relaxed with elbows almost straight. If your child is wanting to stand up off the saddle, encourage them to keep the pedals and crank horizontal.

Braking

First stage is to help your child understand which hand operates which brake. If too much pressure is applied to the front brake only, your child can be at risk of going over the handlebars in a sudden stop. If too much pressure is applied to the back brake only, the brake power is limited to just 20-30% and the bike can rear wheel skid causing loss of control. Teach your child to gently squeeze both brakes evenly and have their index and middle fingers over each brake ready to pull at all times.

When learning to brake, some children will cycle at speed up to the obstacle then apply brakes in an emergency stop manner before colliding. It is useful to teach children to judge stopping speeds and use their brakes to slow the bike well before stopping.

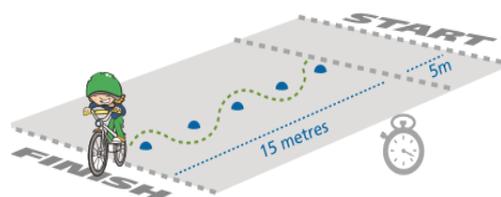
Again using chalk on the ground, draw a 'brake line' and a 'stop line' across the path. Encourage your child to learn how to brake smoothly and with control. As they brake, teach your child to push back with their arms and move their hips backwards which will prevent them going over the handlebars.

Another game to try is to draw a single line across the path and encourage your child to cycle as fast as they can from their start line but stop with their front wheel exactly on the line and both feet on the pedals.

Cornering

Discourage rapid turns of the handlebars as this is likely to cause the child to fall. Steering is more about leaning than turning the handlebars. Encourage your child to choose their line when approaching a corner by approaching wide and exiting wide. Controlling the speed of the bike is crucial when cornering so encourage your child to stop pedalling if required and free-wheel, braking before they reach the corner and accelerating out of the corner if safe to do so.

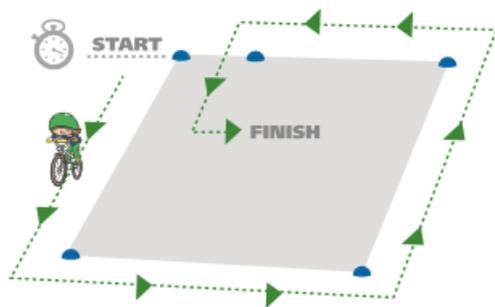
Set up cones or chalk marking on the ground with evenly spaced gaps. Encourage your child to slalom through without hitting the markings. It can be a good habit for your child to learn to keep their inside pedal (closest to the marking) up. As your child improves their cornering



skills, they will develop a rhythm with even smooth leaning. With the same markings, encourage your child to circle each mark before moving on to circle the next.

Pedalling

In order to transmit the most amount of power into the pedals, encourage your child to keep their knees as close as possible to the cross bar without actually touching it. Choose a low gear to start off with when teaching skills and encourage your child to spin their legs. Shoulders and elbows should remain relaxed when pedalling and your child should be mainly looking ahead when pedalling but also scanning their surroundings to stay safe. Encourage your child to place the ball of their foot directly over the axle of the pedal and keep their feet facing forwards not diagonally on the pedal.



Try marking out a square and encourage your child to pedal around following a set out path. This will encourage them to look where they are going and integrate their cornering skills also. Control of the bike is a key element here rather than speed. The course can also be circular, figure of 8 or combination of all of these.

This information is a brief summary of some skills in the Sprocket Rocket Cycling Ireland Course.



This course can be run in your school or local cycling club and is an excellent way for children to develop their bike skills in a fun group. See <http://www.cyclingireland.ie/page/programmes/sprocket-rocket> for further details.

Cycling Ireland also offer further courses such as Cycle Right which is aimed at novice riders and can be offered to children in the senior classes of primary school. See <http://www.cycleright.ie/>



Each year, at the end of June, Bike Week is celebrated nationwide with free biking events on and inclusive family activities in the community.

Remember cycle safety. If your child is cycling on the road, they should always wear a helmet and reflective gear.

Handy gadgets can also be found at bike shops and websites such as:

- Mirrors
- Indicator backpacks with handlebar remotes for children struggling with hand signals



Image from Nomad LED