

Learn to Ride a Bike!

The below is offered as a possible technique in teaching a child, or perhaps even an adult how to ride a bike. It is my preference to select a flat, clean paved parking lot with no distractions. Ensure the client is wearing a properly fitted helmet and if the parents are present, invite them to remove themselves to the side lines so the focus can be one on one with you.

Be positive and friendly, talk to the client, and ask them specifically if they have ever seen anyone ride a bike. While the answer is obvious, their response will be the start of “buy in”. Then ask them if they ever saw some one their own age ride a bike. This will help them believe they too can learn to ride a bike.

Then start the process:

- Lower the saddle as far as it will go. (it’s good if the bike frame is on the small side; ie perhaps their old bike). If the bike has multiple gears, place in lowest gear for easiest pedal – the chain will be closest to the bike on both the front and back cogs or # 1 / # 1 if the gear numbers are illustrated.
- Explain to the client the mechanical workings of the bike, just the basics, like the saddle, pedals, chain, brakes and handlebars for turning
- (for each of the below, on your bike, demonstrate to the client what you would like them to do – this visual aid will reinforce the learning process)
- Have the client walk the bike around by holding the handlebars and positioning her / himself on either side. Continue this for about 30 seconds to one minute, make a couple of circles and have her / him apply the hand brakes and in general get a feel for the bike’s weight, balance, turning and braking.
- Have the client straddle the bike making sure both feet are on the ground. While standing still, practice putting on the brakes as well as gently turning the handle bars / practice steering.
- Have the client slowly walk the bike in a straight line, while still remaining on the saddle. Take little steps at first, and then increase the step length. Repeat a couple of times. Don’t bother with turns at this point, just straight lines. If the parking lot has a very slight downward grade, use it as it will make the walking and what will follow easier. (I don’t like to use the grass or dirt / gravel as it is harder to pedal and quite often uneven.)
- Ask the client how they feel / get feedback. Tell them when you ride a bike without your feet on the ground, and you think the bike might tip over, simply turn gently in that direction. IE, if it leans to the right, turn it to the right to correct.
- Next, with both feet still on the ground, ask the client to push off with both feet and then bring both feet forward to get ready for the next push (like “scooting”). Start with small steps and increase to a larger stride. Soon the client will experience a small “glide” sensation. Make sure the speed is slow and controlled by braking. Explain the need to turn in the direction of the “tilt” to regain balance. At this point most will have a sense of balance and be comfortable on the bike.

- Then, with the pedals at 3 and 9 o'clock, have the client gently push off with the lead pedal, while the other foot, on the ground assists with the "launch". After the push off, have them remove their foot from the pedal to the ground. Again, keep the speed slow. Repeat this several times; then change feet and go through the same procedure. Have the client use the brakes as well as get used to steering for balance.
- Next, after the usual push off, ask the client to coast a bit by keeping their feet off the ground, but "at the ready". Again by demonstrating this tutorial on your bike first, you will reinforce their ability to do same.
- Repeat several times, ask for feedback. Suggest to them to look about 5 to 8 meters ahead of the bike as this will give them both better balance as well as help them see where they are going.
- Most by now have a feel for the bike, and are ready to take the second pedal stroke. Show them how it works and explain to them, that while the bike will tip over standing still, by pedaling and moving forward, this actually keeps the bike upright.
- Have them practice straight lines, shortly they will be scooting across the parking lot and quite often the turn will come on its own.. Show how pleased you are with their performance and efforts.
- Congratulate the client by telling her / him they have mastered the basics of learning how to ride a bike. Ask them to call for their parents to see them "practice".
- The client is now at the first stage of riding a bike; and you have assisted in launching them to a wonderful and rewarding life style.

This process usually takes 30 to 40 minutes, some kids can master it in 15 minutes, but don't worry about time, like the client, enjoy the experience.

Thank you.

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