



So you want to know more about...

# Bicycle Safety

## We like bikes!

It's tempting to think that kids don't need helmets until they ride two-wheelers. We didn't wear helmets at all when we were kids, right? What's the rush?

There are many health and safety innovations that benefit today's children, car seats and bike helmets being among the most notable. Most communities don't have laws about bike helmets — yet, anyway. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't use what we know about their effectiveness to make informed policies and decisions about their use.

The Center for Disease Control's website, <http://www.cdc.gov/safeusa/bike/bike.htm>, reports some startling figures on the risks of serious injury from bike crashes. They note:

- *31% of bike-related deaths were among riders younger than age 16, and two-thirds of those injured were children or young teens.*
- *Injuries to the head are particularly dangerous and are the leading cause of death and permanent disability in bike crashes. Each year an estimated 140,000 children are treated in emergency departments for head injuries sustained while riding bikes.*
- *Wearing a bike helmet reduces the risk of brain injury by as much as 88%, and reduces the risk of injury to the face by 65%.*

Some adults argue that children don't need bike helmets until they bike in traffic. But many accidents happen in **driveways** and on **bike**

**paths**. Children can pick up considerable **speed** on a tricycle, and a collision with a stationary object such as a fence or lamppost can cause serious injury.

So. Enough scary statistics. How can we get kids into the helmet habit? **Start young**. Whether or not you think a child could get a serious injury on a low-lying "Big Wheel" toy, it's hard for a child to understand the difference between a Big Wheel and a trike, or a trike and their first two-wheeler. **If it has pedals, you should wear a helmet**, and this includes when children sit in a seat on their parent's bike or in an attached wagon. This advice goes for children *and* adults! Which brings us to a key point here: the best way to encourage kids to wear helmets is to do so ourselves.

## The Gretchen's House Helmet Policy

- Children must wear helmets when riding anything with pedals.
- Children must remove helmets when they are not riding vehicles which require them, because straps are an entanglement hazard when using other playground equipment.
- Parents will provide, label, and properly fit a helmet for their child if they want him/her to ride pedaled vehicles at the center. (this is because straps are difficult to adjust from child to child and improperly fitted helmets are dangerous.)
- Teachers who are concerned about proper fit will ask parents to make adjustments.
- Helmets may be stored at the center. If a parent *occasionally* forgets a helmet, they may leave a note for the staff that the child may use a spare GH helmet for that day only.

### Further reading about bike safety

- ♦ *American Academy of Pediatrics website:*  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- ♦ *Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute website:*  
[www.bhsi.org](http://www.bhsi.org)
- ♦ *Too Big, Too Small, Just Right*, by Frances Minters

# Bicycle Safety: Facts vs. Fiction

**Myth:** My child doesn't need to wear a helmet on a short ride around the neighborhood.

**Fact:** Your child needs to wear a helmet on every bike ride, no matter how short or close to home. In fact, the majority of crashes happen near home.

**Myth:** A football helmet will work just as well as a bike helmet.

**Fact:** Only a bike helmet is made to protect the head from any fall that may occur while biking. Other helmets are made to protect the head from other types of injury. Never let a child wear another type of helmet while riding a bike.

**Myth:** I need to buy a bike for my child to grow into.

**Fact:** Oversized bikes are especially dangerous. Your child does not have the skills and coordination needed to handle a bigger bike and may lose control. Your child should be able to sit on the seat, with hands on the handlebars, and place the balls of both feet on the ground. Your child's first bike should also be equipped with footbrakes, since children's hand muscles and coordination are not mature enough to handle hand brakes.

**Myth:** It's safer for my child to ride facing traffic.

**Fact:** Your child should always ride on the right, with traffic. Riding against traffic confuses or surprises drivers. Almost 1/4 of bike-car collisions result from riding against traffic.

**Myth:** Children shouldn't use hand signals, because signaling may cause them to lose control of their bikes.

**Fact:** Hand signals are an important part of the rules of the road and should be taught to all children before they begin to ride in the street. They are an important communication link between cyclists and motorists. Any child who does not have the skills necessary to use hand signals without falling or swerving shouldn't be riding in the street to begin with. Many accidents involving older children occur when they fail to signal motorists as to their intended actions.

**Myth:** I don't need to teach my child all of this bicycle safety stuff. I was never injured as a child. Biking is just meant to be fun.

**Fact:** Riding a bike is fun — if it's done safely. Unfortunately, most people don't realize hundreds of thousands of children are seriously injured each year in bicycle falls. Worse still, more than 600 children die from them each year. While you may have been lucky enough to survive childhood without a serious bicycle-related injury, you shouldn't count on luck to protect your child.

*Excerpted from the American Academy of Pediatrics TIPP sheets*

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Does my toddler need a helmet?** Yes. Children under one year old may not have strong enough neck muscles to support a helmet, so they should not ride on a bike seat until they can.

**What are the standards for safe helmets?** Look for CPSC, ASTM, Snell B-95 or N-94 endorsements. The certification doesn't assess fit, so be sure to adjust the straps and padding properly.

**How do I know a helmet is fitted properly?** The helmet should sit securely, level across the forehead. The straps lie flat on either side of each ear and buckle under the chin. The straps

shouldn't have any slack. There should be no gaps between the side of the head and helmet — manufacturer's foam inserts correct this. The helmet shouldn't wiggle out of place when the child shakes his or her head.

**Will I need to buy a new helmet each year?** No. Heads grow less than legs and feet. Most helmets come with several thicknesses of foam pads. You can replace the thick ones with thin ones and adjust the straps as your child grows. **You must replace a helmet after a collision, even a small one. Impact crushes the foam, even if it's not visible to your eye.**