



accidents don't have to happen

RoSPA's Family Cycling Guide



Produced with the support
of the Department for
Transport

RoSPA's Family Cycle Guide

Family riding

Cycling is a great activity that all of the family can get involved in, and it is even better when done together, allowing children to learn skills such as communication, teamwork and road safety, all whilst having fun and getting some exercise. There are hundreds of cycle routes in the UK that are great for family riding, and these can be found everywhere, ranging from the middle of cities to deep in the countryside.

This RoSPA guide is packed full of information to help you get the most enjoyment out of family riding. Written in sections it covers:

- Planning your ride
- Checking your bike
- Riding advice
- Using child bike seats and carriers.

The information in this guide will be equally useful for those organising a bike ride with a small group of children.

Planning your ride

As more people return to cycling as a means of commuting to work, cycling also presents an ideal leisure opportunity, which with a little pre-planning, can involve the whole family. Organising your ride, whether it is a day out or a quick ride around your local area will follow the same process. The following questions and answers will help you plan and organise your family ride.

How long do you want to be out?

If you are used to riding on your own or with a group of adult riders, your average speed will be twice or even three times faster than a child rides, meaning it is very easy to under estimate how long it will take to ride even a short distance. The time you have available will determine how long your ride will be.

What distance should the ride be?

There is no magic figure, the length of your ride will be determined by a number of considerations, most notably the physical ability of those participating in the family ride. As a very rough guide, halve the child's age to calculate the distance of the ride, for example, a six-year-old may be able to ride for three miles and a 10-year-old for five miles. If you are planning to use a bike trailer or child bike seat don't under estimate how much harder it will be to get up those hills and the length of time it will take.

Where should I ride?

This will largely be determined by where you live and whether you plan to ride from home or travel further afield. Riding on the pavement even with young children is not allowed (Rule 64 of the [Highway Code](#)) so it is best to plan your route using quiet residential roads, cycle tracks or off-road routes. If you decide to use an off-road route it is a good idea to ride it first to see if it is suitable. A young child in a bike seat will be uncomfortable travelling along a very bumpy route. Some canal towpaths can be narrow and poorly drained in wet weather



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and this needs to be taken into account. Think about the terrain, what looks like an ideal short ride on Google Maps may be very different in reality if it involves several steep hills.

What makes a good ride?

Even the most enthusiastic child will get tired and bored if there is nothing to see; a good route will have plenty of places to stop and have things to see and do. It is a good idea to pre-ride the route to both check it is suitable and to plan some questions for a cycle treasure hunt or eye spy game.

Most importantly a good ride is all about having fun and you want everyone to return smiling and wanting to repeat the ride. Don't be too ambitious on your first few rides, let everyone's confidence build together with their stamina. There are plenty of good cycling apps now available to help you plan a route if you are not familiar with the area.

Planning on the day

On the day of the family cycle ride, it is important to go through a few simple checks. We have included a few basics but if you have others please let us know them by contacting us on Twitter at @roadsafety or by emailing help@rospa.com and we will add them to the list.

Check list:

Q1. Have you checked the weather?

Depending on the weather forecast you may need to take sunblock, another spare layer of clothing or wet weather gear.

Q2. Have you got a bike repair kit?

If you do get a puncture the less time hanging around the better, it is a good idea to have a spare inner tube and a good puncture repair kit. You can buy self-adhesive patches which can be a good alternative to using glue.

Q3. Have you checked the bikes?

Our [M check film](#) and [M check list](#) will help you.

Q4. Have you got enough refreshments for the ride?

Even on a short ride, especially in warm weather you will need something to drink. Take a snack with you as a quick bite to eat can really boost energy levels when the children start getting tired.

Q5. Have you checked the children's clothing?

Check to ensure that all shoe laces are tied and there is no loose clothing which is likely to get tangled in wheels or chain.

Q6. Have you got a first aid kit for those minor injuries such as abrasions or insect bites?



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Checking your bikes

Before starting your family bike ride it is a good idea to check that all of the bikes are in good working order. If some of the bikes have not been used in a while they will probably need some air in the tyres and oil on the chain.

The best way to check your bike is by doing an [M check](#). If you have not done this before we have a short demonstration film which will take you through the process. You might also like to use our [downloadable checklist](#).

Bikes are extremely reliable and rarely breakdown if looked after correctly. However, punctures are not uncommon especially if riding off road. Take a set of tyre levers with you and if any of the bikes don't have quick release wheels take a spanner to get the nut off, so that the wheel can be removed.

Carry out the M check with the children before the ride and explain what you are doing and why. If you have to repair a puncture or put air in the tyres show them how this should be done.



Riding with the family

If you are riding with your family it is likely that the children will be very excited and keen to get riding, especially if it is the first time they have been out as a family group. Therefore, it is very important to lay down a few ground rules such as the importance of not rushing off (it's not a race), keeping together and riding at the pace of the slowest rider. Try using reward techniques to instil good behaviour, for example challenging you to an off-road slow bike race at a safe location.

Riding on the road

If your ride starts from home it is very likely that you will have to ride on the road at some point. Here are some tips on how you can manage the ride to maximise safety and enjoyment.

Irrespective as to whether the children have had cyclist training, discuss the importance of always looking and listening for traffic and explain that before they change lane or direction they must always communicate with motorists by giving a signal. Young and inexperienced cyclists who have not had training should be told to wait for your instructions.

Riding with children on the road may seem a little daunting but it needn't be and can be great fun. Here are some suggestions for you to follow:

- There is no minimum age when a child can ride on the road. Bikeability level 2 on-road training is



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normally offered to children in years 5 or 6 as at this age they usually have the maturity to understand and deal with light traffic. Younger children if they can safely control their bike without swerving and can stop safely can be taken out but will need careful and constant supervision.

- Ride behind and slightly to the right to where you can see your children. This will create more space between them and passing traffic. Ensure that you are close enough to hear each other. Encourage your children to look behind regularly to check that you are still close. (It is a good idea to practise looking behind in an off-road area before going on the road as children can wobble initially).
- Put the most proficient child at the front.
- If there are two adults one should be at the back and one at the front. If there is only one adult, make a considered decision about whether it is safe enough to take out more than two children.
- Although technically permissible, it is not advisable to ride side by side.
- Leave a safety gap to the cyclist in front so that you don't collide, but keep close enough to ride as a unit allowing vehicles to overtake all riders in one manoeuvre.
- Keep together at junctions, wait for a gap in the traffic which allows all of the riders to negotiate the turn as a unit.
- If possible, try to avoid busy right turns where you can get stuck in the middle waiting for a safe gap before turning into a minor road.
- Where the road narrows ahead such as at a pedestrian island it is advisable for the adult at the back to move out into the middle of the lane to help deter vehicles from squeezing past and carrying out a close overtake.



Further information on how to ride with your family can be found in the [Bikeability parent's handbook](#).

Child bike carriers

If you have a baby or small child, this does not prevent you from riding as a family as there are many child carriers on the market, which like child car seats are divided up according to the weight and age of the child.

- **Carrying a baby under nine months** – you will require a single or double trailer with a baby insert for support. These are designed to carry a baby weighing up to 9kg
- **Toddlers and young children** – you can use either a front or rear child bike seat. Most mounted front



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seats are designed to carry a child weighing 9-15kg (approximately nine months to four years). Once the child is old enough to sit up unaided they can use a rear-mounted seat, these normally will carry a child weighing between 9-22kg (approximately nine months to five years)

- A child who can balance and pedal is ready to use a tag along or trailer bike.

Front-fitting seats

Front seats usually attach to the top tube, a bar fixed above it, or a bracket on the head tube. They are ideal for older children who can hold on themselves; they are just little saddles and footrests bolted to the bike.

Pros of front-fitting seats:

- Your child can see more
- You can talk to your child more easily
- You can explain traffic and what's up ahead easily
- You can also have a rear seat, but this will make the bike heavy and potentially difficult to manoeuvre
- Balance is actually better, particularly over bumps
- It's a bit easier to get on and off the bike
- You can see your child, making supervision easier.

Cons of front-fitting seats:

- It may make pedaling awkward
- Your child is slightly more exposed to wind chill.



Rear-fitting seats

There are three types of rear-fitting seats which you can opt for: cantilevered from the seat tube; fixed to a rear carrier rack; and fixed directly to the seat tube and seat stays. Those that bolt to the frame – or to a rack that's bolted to the frame – are more stable and sturdy but cannot be fitted to bikes with rear suspension.

Before buying a child bike carrier, it is a good idea to visit a cycle shop who can advise you on the style of seat which will best fit your bike and meet your requirements.

Most seats use a three-point harness, with straps going over the shoulders and securing between the legs. A safer alternative is to have a waist belt or bar as well, as toddlers can sometimes slip out of shoulder straps when asleep. Seats that tilt back alleviate this problem, because your child won't be slumping into the straps as can happen in a car seat.

For more information see our guide:



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<https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/cyclists/child-bike-seats.pdf>





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