

Learning to Ride a Bicycle/Tricycle

(with training wheels)

Basic Skills - If your child has difficulty learning new motor skills because of motor planning, attention, regulation, etc., these are the skills he/she should have before attempting to ride a bicycle without training wheels.

❖ **Pedaling**

- When first learning how to pedal, bicycles or tricycles where the pedals automatically turn as the wheels turn can be helpful. This allows the child to learn the movement required for pedaling. If your child's bike does not have this, provide physical and verbal cues to encourage him/her to pedal – push each leg down as the pedal reaches the top of the cycle; try pairing this with a command “push – push – push, etc” or “pedal – pedal – pedal, etc”
- If your child has difficulty keeping his/her feet on the pedals, try using a Velcro strap or old shoelaces to secure feet to the pedals.
- As your child begins to pedal on his/her own, use motivational items/activities to encourage him/her to pedal. For example, if sprinklers/water are motivating, try pedaling back and forth under the water. If the park is motivating, take turns biking and playing on the equipment. If your child enjoys sidewalk chalk, try drawing pictures to bike to or allow your child to draw a picture every time you reach the end of the block or a vehicle parked on the street. Try biking to a ball and hitting it with the front wheel (assistance with steering may be required)

❖ **Steering**

- Practice biking on the sidewalk or a paved path and encourage your child to stay on the path. It may be helpful to draw a line with chalk for your child to follow. Place a toy that your child loves ahead of him/her so he/she can bike straight towards it.
- Once your child keeps his/her bike going straight, work on gradual curves. Draw a gradual curve on the ground with chalk and encourage your child to follow it (“keep your wheel on the line”). The next step would be following a serpentine line with wide curves. Work towards sharper turns, eventually working on turning the corner on the sidewalk.

❖ **Braking**

- Visual Prompts – print out pictures of stop signs and lay them out on the ground. Have your child stop each time he/she gets to one. Initially, this may need to be paired with a verbal prompt as well (see below).
- Verbal Prompts – choose a simple command to use when asking your child to stop. For example: “stop” or “freeze.” Initially pair this with the visual cue by telling your child to stop just before he/she gets to the stop sign.

- It may be useful to practice the braking motion when the bike isn't moving. Using visual and/or verbal prompts, have your child show you what needs to be done to stop (ie. Pulling the hand brake or back pedaling). Practice this several times when stationary, then move to practicing it while moving.
- If your child has difficulty getting good speed, try practicing this on a gradual downhill slope so he/she cannot just coast to a stop.

❖ **Attention**

- If your child has difficulty keeping his/her eyes in the direction of travel try:
 - Visual Cues – draw pictures or a line on the ground with chalk for your child to follow.
 - Verbal Cues – remind your child to look straight ahead. Pair this with a visual cue by choosing something for him/her to keep watching (a building, park, etc)
 - If your child is able to respond to questions, walk backward in front of your child and have him/her tell you how many fingers you are holding up or what picture/toy you are holding up. Continually change the number of fingers or alternate which toy you are holding to encourage your child to continue watching. Although he/she is not necessarily watching where he/she is going, this will help to develop the habit of looking forward.

Bike Programs in Edmonton

- ❖ **Pedal Heads** (<http://www.pedalheads.ca/cycling/index.php>) – offers a bike groups for a wide range of skills levels (with and without training wheels, as well as more advance bike skills).
- ❖ **Edmonton Bicycle Commuters Society** – offers bike groups for children with coordination difficulties, as well as those with physical and other limitations (ie. Children with Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Autism etc). The focus of these programs is to teach kids to ride without training wheels. Your child must be able to pedal, steer and stop a bicycle with training wheels and be motivated to learn to ride without training wheels. For more information contact John Collier at (780) 433-1270.