

## Five Rules for Traffic Cycling\*

1. Drive on the right side of the road, never on the left and never on the sidewalk.
2. When you reach a more important or larger road than the one you are on, yield to crossing traffic. Here, yielding means looking to each side and waiting until no traffic is coming.
3. When you intend to change lanes or to move laterally on the roadway, yield to traffic in the new lane or line of travel. Here, yielding means looking forward and backward until you see that no traffic is coming.
4. When approaching an intersection, position yourself with respect to your destination direction -- on the right near the curb if you want to turn right, on the left near the centerline if you want to turn left, and between those positions if you want to go straight.
5. Between intersections position yourself according to your speed relative to other traffic; slower traffic is nearer the curb and faster traffic is near the centerline.

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*Cyclists fare best when they act  
and are treated as drivers of vehicles.*

### For More Information

*Effective Cycling* video (excellent for adults or older kids)

*Effective Cycling* book (advanced cycling techniques for adults)

*A Kid's Eye View* video (for kids under 12 and their parents)

*Bicycling Street Smarts* booklet. This is the "bicycle driver manual" in PA, OH and FL. See <http://www.bikexpert.com/streetsmarts/usa/index.htm>.

*BikeEd* course. See [www.bikeleague.org/](http://www.bikeleague.org/) for info.

There is much more cycling information by the author at

[www.geocities.com/fredoswald](http://www.geocities.com/fredoswald),

[www.crankmail.com/bike-res.html](http://www.crankmail.com/bike-res.html) and

[www.ohiobike.org](http://www.ohiobike.org)

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**A bike is not a toy. It is your child's first vehicle.**

## Bike Safety for Kids – A Parent's Guide

Some parents are afraid to allow their children ride to school, stores or other places because there are so many fast cars on the roads. However, car-bike crashes are rare -- only about one crash in six involves motor vehicles. (Most are falls or collisions with fixed objects, like trees.) Cycling is safer than you may think. But we can do much better. The crash rate for experienced cyclists is 4-5 times lower than the average. We all need to learn from these experts. We must teach children how to avoid accidents -- especially the kinds of accidents that endanger them most.



**Rules of the Road:** Teach your children to follow the standard rules of the road -- ride on the right, obey stop signs, signal and yield before making turns, etc. These rules allow traffic to flow smoothly so people can get where they want to go quickly and safely. Remember to always set a good example yourself.

**Avoid Driveway and Intersection Dangers:** The most frequent cause of car-bike accidents to young children is called "driveway rideout". Kids must learn to stop at the end of the driveway and look left, right, left to see if it is safe to enter the street. (Do you know why to look left twice?) The next most common accident is caused by failing to yield at intersections. A stop sign requires similar skills (yielding to traffic) as at a driveway.

**Dodge Hazards:** Kids can learn to dodge hazards such as chuckholes and sewer grates without swerving in front of traffic. The trick is learning to look behind before turning or merging. This is something you can teach and practice with your own children.

**Helmets:** A helmet will not prevent a bike crash but it is good, cheap insurance that may allow you or your child to walk away from one. Check to ensure the helmet fits and is adjusted properly. Please set a good example – always wear a helmet when you ride.

**Bicycle Inspection:** Teach your child to make a quick check before each ride to see if the bike is fit for use. You should occasionally make a more thorough safety check. We often find unsafe brakes in children's' bikes. This is a very serious defect.

## Beyond the Basics

We parents need to teach our own children. This means we must know enough about cycling to teach correct techniques. Many of the things we were all taught as kids are wrong and some are dangerous.

Compare how society teaches cycling with swimming. Red Cross water safety instructors must first be competent swimmers, and then they take classes and pass certification exams. What are the qualifications of the people that teach your kids “bicycle safety”? Are they cyclists themselves? Have these teachers themselves taken cycling instruction? If not, watch out!

**A common misunderstanding** about cycling is the extent and source of danger. People believe there is great danger in getting run down by cars passing from behind. Cars are fast and noisy and we cannot see them coming, so the fear is natural. But it is mistaken. Hit from behind accidents represent less than one-half of one percent of urban, daylight cycling crashes.

About 90 percent of car-bike collisions involve turning and crossing traffic. (Just like car crashes.) Most of the rest are caused by wrong way riders or by swerving in front of traffic. Most dangers are right in front of you where you can see and avoid them if you are aware.

**Ride with traffic, not against it.** Some are taught to ride on the wrong side of the road so they can “see traffic coming”. This is illegal and dangerous. The accident rate for wrong-way cyclists is about 3½ times as high as for cycling properly. Pedestrians walk facing traffic so they can sidestep off the road if necessary. But you cannot sidestep on a bike.

**Riding on sidewalks is much more dangerous than the street** -- about two to ten times higher risk. Sidewalk cyclists are in danger at every road crossing and even at every driveway because motorists do not look for fast traffic on the sidewalk. Also, mixing pedestrians and cyclists is dangerous to both. Once a child has been trained to follow the rules of the road, he or she is safer on the street.

**With proper training**, most children of age eight can be taught the first three of the “Five Rules for Traffic Cycling” shown on the back cover. This training allows safe riding on 2-lane residential streets – the type of road appropriate to their ability. By 10, children can be taught all five rules and can handle 4-5 lane streets with moderate traffic. By age 12, responsible children should be ready to ride almost anywhere, except on freeways.

**The “rules of the road”** allow safe and efficient travel for all users of the roads. This is the principle behind the Effective Cycling and “Bike Ed” programs. Those who make up their own rules are in great danger while cyclists who act predictably are much safer.

Cyclists must be able to look behind and yield to traffic before turning or changing lanes (especially to the left). They must develop the skill to look back while riding straight, without swerving. It takes practice to master the skill. Do this with your kids. (See the video *A Kid's Eye View*.)

Another skill is the “rock dodge”. A soft sponge makes a safe “rock” for practice. The trick is to twitch the handlebars quickly to one side then back so the wheels miss the “rock” while the bike barely changes course.

**Beginners usually “hug the curb”** and then wonder why cars pass so close. Experienced cyclists let traffic pass when they can but they “use the full lane” when needed for safety. It takes practice to learn lane positioning. Get tips from an expert or take a “Bike Ed” class. Find information on the web at [www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org).

Some roads are easier than others. Residential streets are good for beginners and for short distances. However, for long trips, crossing major roads can be a problem. A road with a wide curb lane allows space for cars to pass without conflicts. A narrow, multi-lane road is good if the cyclist “uses the full (right) lane”. A narrow 2-lane road with heavy traffic is stressful even for experts because the road is inadequate for the traffic.

**A very dangerous, common mistake** is riding without lights in the dark. About 30 percent of serious cycling casualties occur at night although only about four percent of cycling is done then. The reflectors that come with new bikes are grossly inadequate for safety. Always use a headlight and tail light if you or your children ride in the dark.

Cyclists who follow the *Effective Cycling* techniques have an accident rate only 20-25 percent of the average. Children who can bike safely get healthy exercise and they have less need of “Mom's Taxi”. There is another benefit: Children who are taught to be safe bicycle drivers eventually become safer automobile drivers.