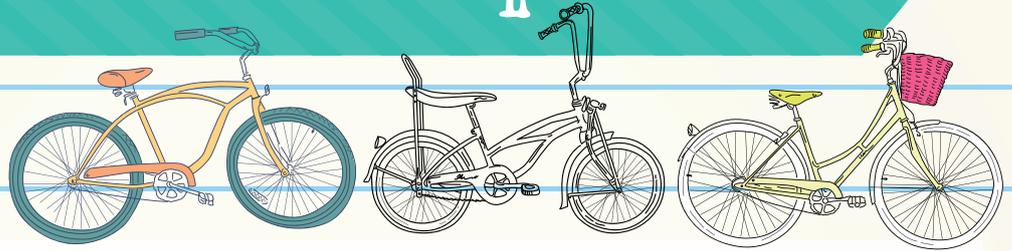


Riding to school with kids: FAQs and Tips



On the footpath

Up to what age can kids ride on the footpath?

Children under 12 years of age can legally ride on the footpath.

Can I ride with my kids on the footpath?

Yes, adults who accompany children under 12 years can also legally ride on the footpath.

Who rides in front – kids or parents?

In general we recommend that the accompanying adult/parent follow closely behind their child. This way you can see them clearly at all times and will be able to communicate instructions and, if need be, warn of hazards. However, on a wide shared path without road crossings, it might be appropriate for the parent/adult to lead and model courteous and safe riding practices for the kids to follow. If there are two adults, one can ride in front and one behind the child/children.

I worry about cars backing out of driveways. What can I do?

This is indeed a real hazard of footpath riding. Children need to be aware of the dangers of reversing cars and parents need to constantly reinforce safety around driveways. Children need to look, stop and wait. You can encourage them to ring their bell when approaching driveways, and wear bright clothing, but be aware that a driver may not hear or respond to a bicycle bell and hi-vis vests do not guarantee they will be seen. A child's peripheral vision is not fully developed until around 10 years of age, so younger children should be encouraged to move their focus around a bit. Like anything, when your child does the right thing, give him or her praise. If they are unable to ride safely near driveways, they are not ready to ride on the footpath, and should walk or be carried on your bicycle. Rear mounted child seats can usually take kids up to 19 kilograms.

Any tips for crossing roads?

You should stop, dismount and walk your bikes together across the road when it is safe to do so.

TOP TIP: SKILL-BUILDING

Make sure your child can start, stop and walk the bike safely, even on a slope. The camber of the road or slope of the footpath can be a challenge if you are only used to riding on flat ground. Practise walking the bike: stand on the left side of the bike with left hand on the left handlebar and right hand on the seat.

I ♥ my Bike

On the road

What's the best time to start the transition from footpath to road?

On a quiet Sunday morning! Once your child can demonstrate good bike control and behave safely, you can start riding on the road with him/her. This may be between the ages of 8 to 10, but it will absolutely depend on your child. You know them best. You also need to feel confident about your own ability to ride in traffic.

Until the age of 10–12, children are not developmentally ready to cope with traffic and should not ride on the road without supervision. For a checklist to determine if your child is “road safe” refer to *A Family Guide to Bike Ed* p17.

Initially, we would recommend a 1:1 ratio of adults to children. Start on quiet, local roads and venture onto roads with more traffic as confidence and skills increase.

Where should I position myself on the road whilst riding with children?

When cycling on roads, the accompanying adult should ride close behind and slightly further out to deflect traffic coming from behind. If there are two adults riding with children, one adult should lead the group, riding exactly where the children are to ride and the other should ride at the back, again, slightly to the right in a ‘protective position’. It is important that the lead rider take care to keep the group close together so that no one else can come in-between.

How can I teach my child to ride on the road when I'm not sure of the road rules myself?

That's a good point – time for a road rules refresher. Cyclists need to follow the same rules as other road users with some exceptions. For more details see *Sharing Darebin's Roads and Paths*, which can be found at www.darebin.vic.gov.au/cyclingtoschool.



TOP TIPS: SHOPPING FOR A BIKE

BIKE FIT: The child should be able to sit on the seat, with hands on the handlebars and place the balls of both feet on the ground. As your child grows, check the height of the seat and handlebar every few months and adjust when necessary. Never raise the handlebars or seat beyond the warning marks on the seat post.

BRAKES: A back pedal brake is good for younger children whose hands may not be large or strong enough to operate hand brakes effectively.

GEARS: Geared bikes will have hand brakes and generally 20-inch or larger wheels. Gears are only useful if the rider knows how to use them properly, which is most likely at about 8 years of age.

TOP TIP

Despite what you might think about a nice soft landing, practising on grass is not a good idea because it's much harder to ride on and gain momentum.

General

How do I find the right bike for my kids?

You may be tempted to buy a bike online or from a department store. However, a reputable bicycle retailer will be able to give professional advice, helping you choose the right type of bike and ensuring it is the correct size and fit. Don't buy a bigger bike for your child to "grow into" because a bike that is too big will be difficult to control. Cheap bikes are often very heavy and more difficult for children to handle. If you can, it's worth paying a bit more for a bike that is lighter and easier to ride.

My child is having trouble with balance – how can we move on from training wheels?

Balance or walking bikes are a great way to help your child develop their balance. Visit www.bikesatwork.com.au for a downloadable tip sheet in our Learn2Ride section with step-by-step instructions for getting your child riding without training wheels.

What if my kids are at different stages with their riding?

A tag-along, which is half a kid's bike attached to the back of an adult's bike, is a good way to keep one child under your control while you supervise an older sibling. This even works when you're accompanying a child aged 12 or over on the road. Be aware that tag-alongs, and the somewhat wobbly ride they create, do take a little getting used to, so it's best to familiarise yourself with tag-along towing before you head off on the roads as a family. Front- or rear-mounted child seats, trailers and cargo bikes are also all great options for younger children not ready to ride on their own.

When is it appropriate for my child to ride without me?

Your assessment of whether your child is ready to ride independently will vary a lot depending on the child, so take into consideration their riding experience, skills and confidence and their character: are they the cautious type or impulsive and a risk taker?. Also consider where they will be riding – you will have ridden this route with them many times and will have a good idea of their capabilities. Finally, you need to consider whether they will be riding alone or riding with other children. When riding with their peers, your child may be more likely to be distracted, show off or take risks. Again, you know your child best!

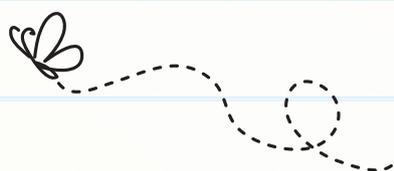
What preparation do I need to do with them to get to this stage?

Practise, practise, practise! If your child needs to improve his or her basic skills such as starting, stopping, going straight and turning, find a large open concrete or asphalt area such as a school yard or vacant carpark to practise. Once he/she can ride with control, why not go on a family bike ride along a shared path? Regular family rides are a great opportunity to point out potential hazards and discuss cycle safety and etiquette.

Some schools offer Bike Ed training as part of the curriculum or as part of Holiday Programs, providing another opportunity for building cycle skills. If your child's school doesn't, you may want to let them know that Darebin Council supports schools to train teachers to deliver Bike Ed.

I'm nervous about riding with my kids because I'm a bit wobbly myself. How can I improve my own skills?

Jika Jika Community Centre offers a range of free or low-cost cycling programs suitable for all levels. For more information: www.jikajika.org.au - max@jikajika.org.au - 9482 5100.



More information

Where can I get more information about bikes and riding with children?

A *Family Guide to Bike Ed* (Available in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Somali, Turkish and Vietnamese).
Download from: <http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/SafetyAndRules/RoadSafetyEducation/PrimarySchools/BikeEd.htm>

Cycling Promotion Fund factsheet:

Children and Bike Riding – Tips for Parents (Information on how to select a bicycle for your child and transporting children by bike) Free online at: http://www.bikeoz.com.au/images/factsheets/Children_and_Bike_Riding.pdf

Bicycle Network Victoria website:

Children's bikes - <https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/general/bikes-and-riding/10594/>

Sharing Darebin's Roads and Paths,

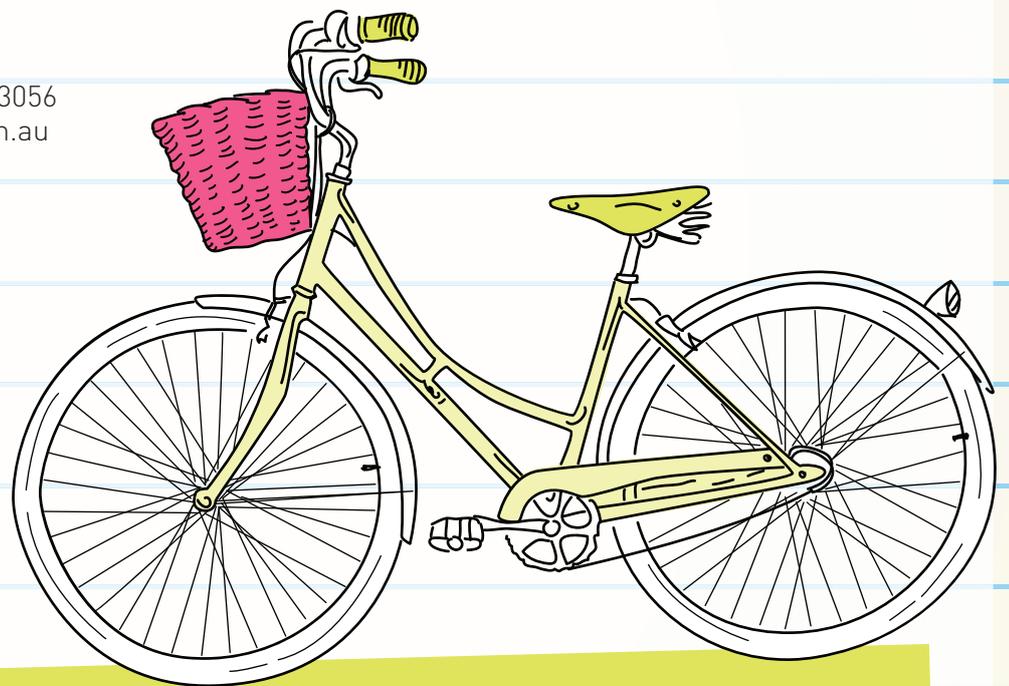
City of Darebin, www.darebin.vic.gov.au/cyclingtoschool

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