

Teaching a child to ride a bike, and going on family cycling trips, are rewarding experiences. The benefits for children of learning to cycle include increased confidence and a sense of independence.

Furthermore cycling can make an invaluable contribution to a child's health and fitness, as well as establishing good travel habits that will last into adulthood.



# Cycling with Children



## Leaflet 4

Other leaflets in the series:

Leaflet 1: basic bike maintenance

Leaflet 2: clothing and accessories

Leaflet 3: security matters

Leaflet 5: electric bikes

Leaflet 6: the right bike for you

### Acknowledgements

This leaflet has been adapted from a series compiled by Sustrans and Bristol City Council. It has been amended with the help of Swindon Bicycle Users Group and a variety of volunteers in Swindon; many thanks to you all. Photos by Jon Ratcliffe/Keith Smith.

For further information about Cycling in Swindon, visit  
[www.swindontravelchoices.org.uk/cycle](http://www.swindontravelchoices.org.uk/cycle)  
[www.cycleswindon.org.uk](http://www.cycleswindon.org.uk)



Follow us on Twitter: @Swindon\_Travel



Find us on Facebook under  
[facebook.com/swindontravelchoices](https://facebook.com/swindontravelchoices)



## Transporting children by bike

**Children of pre-cycling age will still love travelling by bike – there are different carriage solutions for different ages.**

### Up to one year:

Until a baby can hold their head up unsupported they should not be carried in a conventional child bike seat. Once this happens (usually between 6 months and a year) it is a good idea to get the baby comfortable in the bike seat environment as soon as possible, and you used to the extra weight and difference in handling.

### One year - 4 years:

The child can be carried in a specially designed seat fitted to the back or middle of the bike (pictured on the cover). There are many different bike seats and means of attachment. Reclining child seats, although slightly more expensive, do offer a more comfortable ride for a snoozing child. Look out for reviews in cycling magazines and ask friends and cycle shops for advice and recommendations.

### Longer journeys

Trailers are an excellent way to take very young children on long bike rides.

### 4 years - 7 years:

Slightly older (and heavier!) children can help lighten the load by providing pedal power on

a trailer bike or tag-along (effectively the back half of a child's bike attached to the back of the adult one). Kiddie-back tandems are available in a range of sizes allowing one or two adults to cycle with up to two children behind.

## Teaching your child to cycle

The age at which a child is ready to learn to cycle will vary – usually between 4 and 7 years old – so don't try and force the process. Motivation is the key to learning – emphasising the fun aspect will help them take the tumbles in their stride and encouragement and praise are important to help them persevere.

It is obviously best to start children cycling away from traffic. Your local park is a good place to teach them but start them on the paths NOT the grass as it is too hard for them to pedal on grass,. Once they have built up their confidence they can try quiet roads – but make sure they are aware of safety requirements and encourage them to wear a helmet.

## Buying your child a bike

It is better to buy the right size rather than get one which is too big, that the child can 'grow into'. An oversized bike will not only be dangerous, it is likely to put your child off cycling. Once they have outgrown the bike, pass it on and get them another correctly sized bike.

**Tip:** It is advisable to choose a bike without a crossbar so that the child can fall through the bike and not off it.

### Checklist

- ✓ Older babies and young children can be carried in a bike seat or a trailer for longer journeys.
- ✓ Older children can use a trailer bike.
- ✓ Introduce your child to cycling as early as possible but choose the right size bike.
- ✓ Make sure helmets fit correctly and comply with safety standards, and replace after serious falls.

### Helmets

Helmets can provide vital protection if you fall off your bike, so they are a particularly recommended for young children learning to cycle.

You should only buy a helmet if it carries a CE mark and one of the normal safety standards. It is essential that it is comfortable and fitted correctly – a badly fitted helmet can be a liability not a protection. A good cycle shop can help you choose the right size. If a helmet has been involved in a serious accident or fall then replace it. When fitting a helmet on a child, take great care not to pinch the skin under the chin, as this is a sure way of putting them off wearing it. Never borrow / lend helmets, nor buy second hand.