

Nine Steps To Ride A Bike

These nine steps will work for most children unless they have profound balance issues. These are the steps went through with my daughter because she found it extremely difficult to learn, and she likes to know where she is in a plan.

There are two things your child needs to ride a bike: confidence and balance. Once they have these, they can enjoy the freedom riding a bike gives other children.

I would venture to say these are easy steps, but if you're reading this you won't believe me. What I will say, try it. Give it a go. It will require regular practice at least every second day for a month or two. You will have to buy into this project as much as your child.



Step 1: Get Bike Ready



Take off pedals. Yes, take off the pedals. The first thing we need to teach is balance, and pedals just get in the way. When my daughter used to ride with stabilisers, she leant to one side so her weight was on one stabiliser and she tilted her head to compensate. The thing she needed to know before ever considering riding a bike was balance.

Alternatively, if you are after a quicker (but more expensive) solution, you can look at purchasing a specialist bike such as a Strider 12 No-Pedal Balance Bike or a Chicco Bullet Balance Bike. There are bikes for all ages so it doesn't really matter how old your child is when they start this.

Take off stabilisers. This might seem drastic, but it is the best way to start. If you really can't take them off because your child won't allow it, adjust them so they are actually off the ground.

Adjust the saddle so your child can sit on their bike and still be able to put both feet completely flat on the ground at the same time (cyclists will know this adjustment is too low, but we're aiming to ride, not win the Tour de France). If I'm doing something scary to me, I want to know I can put my feet on the ground at any time.



Service the bike. Your child needs to have absolute trust in the bike, and this means knowing the brakes will stop them when the time comes. Make sure nothing rubs and that there aren't any unusual noises.

Step 2: Find A Gentle Slope And Coast Down It



I don't mean a steep hill. I just mean your average gentle slope. We are talking a gradual slope. The longer the better. Make sure it is quiet, wide and with no cars. Selection of the right slope is vitally important. I had to drive 20 minutes to the right slope, and we had to do this for 30 days straight – this is your commitment to the project!

Get your child on their bike and ask them to walk. This is where the pedals would get in the way. It is also about this point you will get the question, 'Why haven't I got pedals?' You reply, 'We'll put them on later' You will be asked this question numerous times I'm sure, but just answer That's Step 5. In the meantime, keep asking you child to walk down the slope on their bike.

When they get used to walking, encourage them to miss out on a step and coast for that one millisecond. Keep doing this. This one millisecond will gradually turn into two milliseconds. Then three. What we are learning here is balance, usually the main obstacle to learning to ride. So be patient. This step might last a couple of weeks. This stage is the key. Everything else will follow. What you need to do is make sure you practice this as much as possible. Hence your selection of slope is vital. Too steep – all we create is fear. Too shallow – we never glide or coast.

Step 3: Get Really Good At Coasting So It Becomes Gliding



This sounds like Step 2, and it is, except bigger. Those milliseconds should build up to seconds, and then 5 seconds, then 10. Then tens of seconds. Your child should get confident in pushing off and gliding for longer and longer down the slope.



It is at this point you need to give a quick lesson on how the brakes work. In an ideal world your child will brake 60% left hand for the back brake; 40% right hand, front brake. The last thing we want is a crash.

Step 4: Gliding To Free Wheeling For Minutes



The transition between Steps 2 and 3 isn't so large. Perhaps they might even get to it in a few days. But this Step 4 is the key to the whole riding thing: balance. They need to be able to free-wheel for minutes without putting their feet down. They need to get to the stage where they can do it without a thought. They will start to get bored of free-wheeling down your slope, just to walk back, and do it all over again. This is good. They have to be so proficient at this that they are just itching to get to the next step, but don't let them until you can see for yourself that this free-wheeling for minutes down a slope.



Warning Repeat: don't move to next step until you know your child can balance. If you go to the next step without fully mastering this step, the next step cannot work. Worse, you may even dent your child's confidence which could really set back all the hard work you've done thus far.

Step 5: Put Pedals Back On Bike



Putting the pedals back on the bike will get rid of the constant questioning as to why they were taken off the bike in the first place. Everyone knows a bike should have pedals!

Move the pedals so they are horizontal and out of the way. Continue to free-wheel down the slope. The point of this stage is to get your child used to having the pedals back on (where they are in relation to their legs) and to show them nothing has fundamentally changed by having pedals on. They still have their balance. They can still free-wheel down the slope just as easily.

Step 6: Putting Feet On The Pedals



Hopefully this step is short, even optional.

Hold the saddle and as your child puts one leg on a pedal that is near to the ground.

Push them off while you run along, holding the saddle and encouraging them to lift the other leg to the other pedal. If you don't quite have the running ability for this, move to Step 7 and take that very slowly.

Step 7: Putting Feet On The Pedals On Their Own



Start with one pedal near the ground and get your child to put a foot on it. Then free-wheel down the slope again. At this stage your child may not be confident enough to lift the other leg to the other pedal. That's ok. Let them dangle their free leg so they feel they won't fall over. A fall at this stage is the last thing you need.

After a day or two, when they've mastered keeping one leg on the bottom pedal, encourage them to lift the other leg to the other pedal, even if it's for a few milliseconds. Milliseconds need to turn to seconds. Seconds to tens of seconds. Tens of seconds to minutes. In other words, we are repeating Stage 2 all over again, but with pedals on.

Step 8: Encourage Them To Pedal



This is the real home straight, but again don't rush. Keep going down that slope, then walk up. When your child is ready, he or she will turn those pedals. They know naturally what they should be doing. They have the confidence to free-wheel down their slope without falling off. Just be patient. They will do this last step themselves. Then congratulations! Your child has done it. You may be at the end of your six or eight week tether, but the sheer sense of achievement on your child's face will be worth every moment.

Step 9: Teach Them To Start Themselves Off



This is more tricky than it sounds and so it might take a week or two.

Hold the back of the saddle and let your child move the pedal into the starting position on their favoured foot – left foot if left handed. You need to hold their weight until they get moving and let go. As they practice, it will take less and less effort from you.

Final Words



Remember don't rush. Learning to balance is the key thing. It will take time, effort and perseverance from you as much as them. You mustn't become frustrated. You must make them take it slowly and not skip any steps or move to the next step until they have mastered the previous step. They need to build on solid foundations. Good Luck.

