



# Children cycling to school – frequently asked questions



## Children and young people cycling to school: Some key parental questions addressed

*We know children want to cycle more – they especially love the sense of freedom and independence it brings. Whether cycling to school or going for a family ride, getting out and about on a bike is a healthy, low cost and enjoyable activity from which all the family (and the whole community) can benefit.*

### Read on to find some answers to commonly-asked questions from parents and carers:

#### 1. “Cycling is dangerous!”

We often find that people who think cycling isn't safe have had a bad experience themselves, or know someone who has. The way to cycle safely is to ride responsibly and assertively, making sure you and your intentions are obvious to other road users.

Do this by:

- making eye contact with other road users;
- making yourself as visible and prominent as possible by staying approximately a metre from the kerb;
- wearing clothes that are light or bright in colour - or reflective;
- using lights at night, and in poor visibility conditions;
- using your bell whenever it will help alert pedestrians/other cyclists to your presence;
- Make sure these messages are made clear to your children, and demonstrate to your children that you are using these principles when cycling with them;
- The Council has installed “Advanced Stop Lines” (ASLs) at many city junctions for cyclists. These red-coloured boxes provide a safe space in front of queuing traffic – point them out to your children when you see them and explain how they work for cyclists.

#### 2. “The roads are too busy for my child to ride to school”

It's a common belief that you cycle the same route as you would drive to get to school, eg using a busy road. This is not necessarily so: there are often alternative, quieter roads and cycle paths that can be used to cycle to school. Some of these are shown on our free city cycle maps and guides – these are also available in libraries, cycle shops, tourist information centres and at many other city public outlets.

If you do have to cross a busy road then you may need to make the time to find the safest place to cross and be prepared to wheel your bike along the path occasionally. It's a good idea to discuss and cycle the chosen route(s) with your child/ren before they undertake it for the first time.

The council's JourneyOn website [www.journeyon.co.uk](http://www.journeyon.co.uk) has a journey planner you can use for planning cycle trips. It gives you the option to choose the most direct route or the flattest route, which in some cases may be a little longer - but which you may prefer. Ben Sherratt, the Bike It Officer will be happy to help you and your child/ren find a safe route to school and to help you practise using it with your child/ren.



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**Remember: the more people who cycle or walk to school, the fewer cars there will be on the road and the safer the area will be for everyone.**

### **3. “I can’t ride a bike myself / I am not confident enough to cycle on the roads”**

Some parents are afraid to let their children cycle to school as they are not confident enough to cycle themselves. There are also several independent cycle training providers in the city.

### **4. “My child cannot cycle to school because they haven’t had any formal cycle training”**

It is not essential for every child to have undertaken cycle training to cycle to school, and children will often ride with their parents. Some children are much more practised and competent than others and ultimately it is the parent’s decision whether their child is capable of doing so.

The council, always advises that children and parents take up cycle training if they can; not just to acquire skills but also to build up confidence.

Brighton & Hove City Council’s Bikeability cycle training is available free for years 5 and 6 through schools, or you can learn as a family with a private cycle trainer (see Q3 above ). Several Bike It schools have also had the opportunity to have training from year 3.

### **5. “My child doesn’t have a bike/helmet/other equipment – I don’t think I can afford it”**

Bikes and equipment do not have to be expensive items. Ben Sherratt has arranged a discount of 10-15% at local bike shops for pupils from Bike It Schools.

If you’d prefer to buy a second hand bike, the Police often hold bike auctions, or schools can run a bike swap day. Contact Ben if you feel there is a need for this in your child’s school.

### **6. “I don’t want my child to bring his/her bike to school in case it gets stolen”**

The council has recently installed or extended, secure, covered cycle parking at most city schools. Ensure your child parks his/her bike in the designated facility provided, and locks it up securely. Ask your school about arrangements for storing accessories such as helmets or cycling clothing.

**Regarding locks:** invest in a good lock for your bike, making sure you and your child know how to use it properly: this will help prevent the bike from getting stolen. You do not need to pay a fortune for a lock. Good quality combination cable locks can be purchased at a very reasonable price.

The council has a “BikeOff” campaign leaflet, which explains correct locking procedures, to minimise the risk of theft. Contact us for a copy, and ensure your child understands it and uses the advice. This is especially important when the bike is parked in a public place (ie off school premises.)

The Council has installed a number of Pedal Cycle Parking Places (PCPPs) across the city: using these will make it easier and safer to lock your cycle. PCPPs are blocks of cycle parking.



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### 7. “I have to drive on to work and don’t have time to ride with my child as well” – or “I have to drop my children off at different schools in the morning”

There are a few ideas that could help you here:

- Could your child/children cycle with other children to school or with another parent?
- Perhaps you could take it turns to cycle in with them? Or could your child stay with someone the night before (maybe a Grandparent) and cycle to school?
- Could you drive halfway, or to a suitable point, and let your children cycle from there?
- Perhaps you could meet other people somewhere and start a ‘cycling bus’/‘train’?

### 8. “How will I know my child has reached school safely?”

The same way you would know if they had travelled any other way to school. The best way is for them to cycle with their friends and or an adult.

### 9. “I / they have too much stuff to carry to school on a bike”

Many children walk to school and carry their belongings in a rucksack. You can also wear a rucksack while riding a bike, or use panniers that clip to the rack over your back wheel. If they are bringing an instrument or something large to school, consider leaving it at school and cycling maybe once or twice a week.

One city teacher told us he cycles every day, and for the majority of journeys can carry everything he needs. What fits in one bag is all he can manage to mark in an evening anyway!

### 10. “My child’s bike is broken and I don’t know how to fix it / my bike needs a service and a safety check”

If it is a simple problem like mending a puncture, could someone you know fix it for them? In many Bike It schools we are running bike maintenance workshops after school to teach children and parents basic skills like these, so they can look after their own bikes. If it is a bigger problem, or you just want the bike checked over and “tuned up”, take it to the local bike shop: they may do you a deal. Another route would be to take advantage of the “Bike Doctors” who come to many council events – they offer a free check over and may be able to fix minor faults on the spot.

### 11. “If there was an accident would it be the school’s fault?”

Cycling accidents are very rare. However pupils travel to school, whether by vehicle, bike or foot, is the parent’s decision and responsibility.

### 12. “We live too far away to cycle to school”

See question 7.

### 13. “We live too close to make it worthwhile cycling to school”

Children love to use their bikes even if they live just around the corner from school. Cycling to school is a novelty, and if children have positive cycling experiences when they are young they are far more likely to cycle to secondary school and work when they are older. This brings a



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number of benefits, particularly for health and weight control. You could also encourage your children to cycle at weekends, at the local park for instance, or have a family outing on your bikes.

### 14. “There’s no ‘cycling culture’ at our school – how can we change this?”

Every school in the city is expected to have an up to date School Travel Plan. A School Travel Plan is a document prepared by a school giving a range of measures to improve and promote safe, active and sustainable school journeys. The school will have committed itself to increasing the number of children cycling, walking or car-sharing to school, and the document needs to be reviewed and updated annually. Ask your school for a copy of their STP and perhaps offer to work with the school to help keep it a “living” document that helps the whole school community’s sustainability.

### 15. “Does my child have to wear a cycle helmet when cycling?”

It is not a legal requirement in the UK to wear a cycle helmet. However, the council does require children to wear a cycle helmet when doing Bikeability cycle training at school and your child’s school may have its own rules, requirements or recommendations about cycle helmet wearing on school premises.

### 16. “I have younger children to bring to school. How can I transport them on a bike?”

A variety of seats, trailers and carriers are available so children of any age can be carried on a bicycle. This independent website gives information on options [www.whycycle.co.uk/cycling\\_with\\_children/childtrailers](http://www.whycycle.co.uk/cycling_with_children/childtrailers).

Finally ... remember cycling to school may not always be possible every day! A “regular” cyclist cycles probably only twice a week. Ultimately, it is the parent’s and child’s choice if they want to cycle to school or not but do consider giving your child the opportunity to experience the fun and benefits of cycling for themselves.

With acknowledgements and thanks to Bike It Officer Ben Sherratt.

### Further information:

- Cycling to school: [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/cycling-and-scooting-school](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/cycling-and-scooting-school)
- Bike It scheme: [www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/bike-it/](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/bike-it/) - Ben Sherratt Bike It Officer call 07824 813 556
- Bikeability Cycle Training for children offered by Brighton & Hove City Council call 01273 293847 and [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/cycle-training](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/cycle-training)
- Cycle maps and guides, and other cycling-related city information ccan be found at [www.journeyon.co.uk/cycle](http://www.journeyon.co.uk/cycle)
- Scootability scooter training call 01273 293845.