



HOW TO ENCOURAGE MORE **BIKING TO SCHOOL**

“With Independence Comes Responsibility



Once a child learns to ride a bike, it is their first taste of freedom. It is their first vehicle and they figure out quickly that they have more independence when they ride versus walking. With independence comes responsibility. Since a bicycle is a vehicle, children must learn the rules of the road. They have to follow the same signs and signals that drivers do. They should practice what side of the road to ride on and how to navigate when they are riding with traffic. Once they learn these steps, they are ready to ride to school.

Unfortunately, with the speed and volume of drivers on the road these days, parents and even schools and school districts are reluctant to promote students riding to school. Parents wonder if the roadways from their house are safe enough to allow their children to ride to school. Schools and school districts worry about liability and if there is enough safe space on campus to park bikes. I will go through some ways to tone down the worry and encourage safe riding to school. They are:



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Work with city street officials to review conditions around your school

It is always a good idea to work with the street transportation folks from your city to discuss what barriers to riding may exist and for the city to review the issues and fix what is possible to fix. The issues could be the lack of bike lanes all the way up to the need for a new traffic signal to get students across a busy street. Most transportation departments are looking to promote active transportation and biking is an essential part of that. Some of these street projects take some time to complete. The sooner a school or school district could meet them, the sooner the work could be completed.



Set up a Bike Rodeo at your school

A great way to promote safe riding and provide safety equipment to students is through hosting a bike rodeo at your school. A bike rodeo is an organized roadway course that allows students to test their skills (and to learn new ones) on their bikes. Local police and fire personnel should be involved and allowed to lead these events. They are respected by students so their words about safety carry more weight. Police and Fire Departments often get grants to provide safety equipment for students such as bike helmets and even bikes that could be handed out at the rodeo. Proper helmet fitting, proper bike fitting and registering a bike with an ID number are some things that could happen at a rodeo.

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Set up a Bike Train Program at school

A bike train is a supervised riding program created by Safe Routes to School. Parents or school staff can lead these programs where students are picked up one at a time from their houses or from a centralized meeting spot and ride like a long train to school. To ride home after school, the group would meet on campus and ride to individual homes or to the centralized meeting spot. If enough students want to ride to school from different parts of the neighborhood, several bike train routes may need to be created. That would require more parents or school staff members to volunteer and participate. Having more routes will lead to more students riding to school.



Set up a Bike Safety Training Program through P.E. Classes

If your school has a PE teacher that is a cyclist, it is an easy process to work bike safety classes into their lesson plans. If your state has a SRTS Coordinator and a SRTS Program, they will have bike safety training material available for your school to use. An example of this would be in Minnesota. MDOT has the materials and the schedule for schools to follow for their elementary students. Some cities have programs through their Street Transportation, Police or Fire Departments that can be used at schools. A lot of times, they have training personnel that can come and perform the training at the school. Some hospitals have injury prevention folks who will do bike safety training at schools as well. It's just a matter of finding available resources.

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Add bike maintenance to bike events

A great way to help students who don't have a working bike is to offer bike maintenance from a local bike shop. They can be a part of a bike rodeo, a bike class or a bike riding event. This is normally the number one complaint of students when it comes to riding their bike to school "my bike doesn't work". If maintenance is the major complaint among your students, you can set up a yearly, quarterly or monthly "Bike Maintenance Rodeo" at your school. It's a "win-win" for the school and the bike shop to partner up because it helps both sides.



Set up “Bike to School Day” at your school

This event was created by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership in 2012 as a way to champion biking to school. It works similar to “Walk to School Day” where student, parent and school staff riders meet at the same location and follow the same route on a ride to school. Adding government officials like the Mayor, the Governor, Council Members, etc can really spice up these events. Adding police to the ride can help with safety and giving it a theme like “crazy bike day” can excite students about the ride.

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Have PTA buy and give out bikes

A school PTA can help motivate students to ride by offering a new bike as a raffle item for students who ride. They could set it up so that the students have a punch card for each week the students’ ride. At the end of the month, PTA could hold a raffle at their meeting to determine the winner. It could also help promote PTA membership as well.



Set up a bike club at school

If there is a staff member who is a cyclist, they could help to set up a bike club as an “after school” program. The club could provide students with special training, special material giveaways, special weekend rides and special guests. A good staff member could come up with a number of ways to expand the club and increase student membership. Parents could even join the club members for weekend rides.

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Provide proper bike racks and lockers

Having places to put bikes is a big issue for schools. At the beginning of each school year, schools should review the bike rack area on their campus. If the racks are worn or bent, work with the school district to repair or replace the racks as needed. If an administration notice there are more bikes than the existing racks can handle, ask the district to help provide more. The school PTA may also be able to help to purchase new racks.

Final Notes

Riding a bike to school has a number of benefits for students. It provides exercise while helping to develop leg muscles and strengthen their bones. It will increase their stamina and improve cardiovascular development. That being said, the dangers of vehicle traffic and following the rules of the road must be stressed as well. Operating a bike on the road requires a student to consider the risk and be aware of their environment. The better a school and their parents understand both sides of the coin, the more safe and fun biking to school can be.

