



## Bikeability Balance



**Your child will shortly be taking part in a Bikeability Balance course at school. Bikeability Balance is a series of school-based sessions that aims to give children the basic balance and co-ordination skills they will need to learn to ride a bike. It involves fun games carried out on balance bikes (bikes without pedals) to develop handling and awareness.**

Research has found that 40% of 6 year-olds are unable to ride a bike. Part of the reason for this is that children often get stuck using a bike with stabilisers or a tricycle, and are unable to progress easily to using a bike without stabilisers. By using balance bikes with no pedals, Bikeability Balance sessions focus on developing balance, rather than the ability to pedal. This helps children make the transition to using a bike with pedals. Bikeability Balance also develops gross motor skills and improves early years fitness.

### What will my child learn to do?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Identify parts of a balance bike          | Stop with control a) with feet, b) with brake |
| Get on and off a balance bike comfortably | Make the bike go where they want              |
| Set off with control                      | Be aware of surroundings (look around)        |
| Push and glide                            |   |

### So what next?

Some Reception class children may already be riding pedal bikes. The Bikeability Balance sessions will help them to develop their balance and control and given them more confidence in their riding.

After taking part in Bikeability Balance many children will be ready to start learning to ride a pedal bike without stabilisers. Most will need some support with this. Even where they can ride a balance bike confidently and already have practised pedalling, putting those skills together will usually take a little time and effort.

Stabilisers are usually simple to remove with a normal spanner. Simply undo the outside nut and take off all the washers and the stabiliser bracket, then leave aside the stabiliser itself and replace everything else in the same order it all came off, before tightening the nuts back up fully.

Where a child is finding it difficult to make the transition, it can help to turn a pedal bike into a balance bike by simply removing the pedals for a time. This can usually be done with a standard adjustable spanner – it's important to know that the left-hand pedal has a left-hand thread, meaning clockwise to loosen and anti-clockwise to tighten. Lower the saddle so that the child can get good traction on the floor with the soles of their feet in order to push themselves along. Once you have put the pedals back on you should gradually raise the saddle back up so that they can pedal comfortably.

Any area of open, flat tarmac or concrete is a good place to hone the basic skills. To start with, a very gentle downhill slope can be helpful – but not too steep! Visit <https://readysetrider.co.uk/> for lots of useful ideas and activities to help your child progress. We also run community Learn to Ride sessions for all ages – see <https://www.chorleyssp.co.uk/events>

Now why not plan a family bike ride? Visit <http://checkoutchorley.com/cycling/> to download helpful cycle maps of the local area.



## Buying a bike for your child

There's a really useful guide from Cycling UK at <http://www.cyclinguk.org/guide/buying-right-bike-for-your-child>

That's rather in-depth, and the specific bikes they recommend tend to be at the upper end of the price range, so here's a few simple dos and don'ts based on our experience of working with children and bikes.

- **Weight.** Many cheaper bikes tend to be heavier and if the bike feels heavy to you then just imagine how it will feel to your child. An over-complicated design will usually be heavier than a simple one. Your child might love the idea of a bike that looks like a motorbike with lots of extra bodywork and big fat tyres, but all this adds weight. If they can't move the bike around easily it will quickly fall out of favour and get left in the shed. If you are buying online then check the specifications. If the retailer or manufacturer doesn't list a weight this is probably because they don't want you to know!
- **Size.** We often see children on bikes that have been bought for them to "grow into". A strong, confident rider might be able to get by on a bike that is too big for them but a child who is less confident or just learning will struggle and it will put them off, possibly forever.
- **Gears.** Bikes for smaller children generally come with just one gear and this is generally all that most kids up to age 7 or so will need. We find that some manufacturers tend to "overgear" their kids bikes, meaning that the single gear they have is too high. We often find children struggling to get going up even the slightest of hills, and even on the flat, because of this design flaw. Look at the difference in size between the 2 cogs that are connected by the chain. If the chainring (the cog at the front connected to the pedals) is many times bigger than the sprocket (the cog attached to the back wheel) then your child may find the gear too high. If you find yourself with an overgeared bike then a bike repair shop may be able to change one of the cogs to rectify the problem.
- **Bike Building.** If you buy through a bike shop they will always offer to provide the bike fully built, usually at no extra charge, though you might need to wait a few days or so. If you buy online or from a supermarket or Argos-type retailer, the bike will come part-built in a box. If you're not confident that you can build it correctly then most local bike repair shops offer a building service at a reasonable price. An incorrectly built bike is potentially unsafe, and you would be surprised how many examples we see when working with children.
- **Second Hand.** There is often good value to be had with second hand bikes. Once your child has outgrown their bike, you will get a good resale price if it is a decent quality machine that has been kept in good order. Ebay, Gumtree and Facebook marketplace can be a good place to look. There are also some fantastic charity projects offering reconditioned bikes. **Gearing Up** in Wigan and **Cycle Roots** in Blackburn are the closest to our area.
- **Maintenance.** Even the most expensive bike will have some parts that will wear out over time. Brake blocks, brake cables and gear cables are the most likely, also tyres, especially once your child discovers the joy of skidding! Keeping tyres pumped up firmly will help them last longer and also help reduce punctures. A drop of oil on the chain every once in a while will help to reduce wear on the chain and cogs and also prevent that annoying squeaky noise. Brake blocks and cables are inexpensive and again our local repair shops will happily fit them for a small fee if you're not confident to do it yourself.