



The Right Bike

Purchasing a bicycle for your child is exciting for both of you. A bicycle is your child's first vehicle and one of a child's first steps to independence and healthy transportation. Kids are usually most interested in the look and color of the bike (well, most adults are too).

Remember bicycles are vehicles, not toys. The wrong size bicycle may cause your child to lose control and be injured.

Keep your child safe by following these hints:

Buy a bike that is the right size, not one to "grow into." Oversized bicycles are particularly dangerous.

When buying a bike, do these simple checks for proper fit:

Have your child stand over the bicycle with both feet flat on the floor. Straddling the center bar, your child should be able to keep both feet flat on the ground with at least several inches of clearance between the crotch and the bar for mountain bikes and about one inch for ten speed or road style bikes. No clearance means the frame is too big. If there is no top tube, your child should be able to put his or her elbow on the front of the bike seat and touch the handlebar stem with his or her fingertips.

Still sitting on the seat, your child must be able to comfortably reach the handlebars and squeeze the handbrakes, if there are any. If he or she can't reach and easily squeeze the brakes, find a smaller bike or one with pedal or "coaster" brakes.

Get a bike simple enough for your child to handle. Some kids have trouble with handbrakes or multiple gears. Only buy a bike your child is comfortable using. Listen to his or her concerns because your child is often the best judge of what feels right.

Buy a bike suited for the type of cycling your child will be doing. There are many styles of bikes and having the appropriate kind is important.

- For instance, a one-speed or BMX-style bike won't be much fun for cycling any distances on the side walks or roads.
- Road bikes (like "10 speeds," although most have 14 to 27 speeds these days) are easy and efficient for cycling on roads. They are available in sizes that fit 10- to 12-year-olds and older.
- Mountain bikes are great for off-road cycling and can also be ridden comfortably on roadways.

Be sure to let your child actually test-ride the bike. For proper fit and control, your child needs to test-ride the bike. Shop at your local bike shop. Bicycle shops typically sell higher-quality bikes at competitive prices and will stand behind their products. In the long run, a better-quality bicycle will save you money on replacement parts and repairs. A good bicycle will last for years and, with good maintenance, can be sold once your children have all outgrown it. A bike from a bicycle shop has also been properly assembled and is therefore safer. An improperly assembled jumping bike may literally fall apart during use.

