



ROBERT M. SELIG, M.D., FAAP
JOANN C. COZZA, D.O., FAAP
DANIEL S. SELIG, M.D., FAAP
ANDORRA PEDIATRICS
8945 RIDGE AVENUE
SUITE 3-4-5
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19128
215-483-8558

Teach Your Child Bike Riding In One Hour

That's the way it was for me anyway. But after several weekends of turfed lawns, trashed tulip beds, a battered bike, a bruised kid, and a near-terminal loss of human dignity, I figured it was time to engage in another Great American Pastime known as "inventing a better way" Here it is: how to teach bike riding in one hour without running yourself silly. It's easy. And it's kid-tested.

How long would it have taken us to learn to walk as babies if we had had to learn by walking on the side of a two-by-four? We'd still be crawling on our hands and knees, ruining expensive clothes, and having a tough time on the dance floor. Learning to ride a bike on a sidewalk is a little like learning to walk on a two-by-four.

Your child can't even sit on a bike yet and you're asking your child to master the complex art of steering. Take the bike and your child to a school playground or parking lot. Here, your child will not have to worry about steering until learning how to stay up is mastered.

Most of us "just learn" how to ride a bike in a single, blazing, inspired moment after a suitable period of bashing our knees on the ground-sometimes for as long as two summers. One moment we can't ride to save our lives. The next moment we can. We know how. But we don't know "the how."

The fact is, there is a real method to riding a bike and the secret is all in the front wheel. Simply put, when you start to fall right, turn the front wheel right and when you start to fall left, turn the front wheel left.

This is the technique we master in our "inspired moment." We think we learned the balance, the feel, of bike riding. What we really learned was a way to stop the tilt of a falling bike by turning the wheel (think of it as sticking your leg out for support) while at the same time redirecting the momentum of the bike, allowing the bike to stay up. Of course, in actual practice, we constantly make these small, front wheel adjustments - adjustments so small we don't even notice them.

You are in an empty parking lot. Your kid is on his/her bike, feet on the pedals, hands on the handlebars. You're holding your child up by the back of the bike seat. Next move is **don't move!** **Here's where you teach "the how."**

Tilt the bike to the right and to the left. Tell your child, "When you start feeling yourself fall this way (right), turn your front wheel this way (right). When you start feeling yourself fall in this way (left), turn your front wheel this way (left)." Stand there, without moving, for five or ten minutes practicing with your child. Tilt the bike unexpectedly one way and then the other until your child gets the hang of turning the front wheel into tilts.

Walk, don't run, with your child. Move slowly. Hold lightly on to the back of the bike seat. The concept of turning the front wheel into a fall is easy to understand. However, there are two things your child will probably

do that you should practice here: your child will wait until tilting too far into the fall before correcting with the front wheel, or will overcorrect and go right into a fall/correct situation in the opposite direction.

Teach your child to correct early. Tilt the bike very slightly and show your child how far to correct with the front wheel. Tilt the bike a little more teaching the art of turning the wheel to correct. Show your child that by waiting too long, the bike will either crash or start losing control in the other direction.

You will have to run a little now. But you won't have to do it for long, and, even better, you won't have to do it in front of the neighbors.

Run slowly at first. Let your child set the pace. Stay back, just out of your child's field of peripheral vision. Hold lightly on to the back of the bike seat. Let go of the seat as soon as possible for as long as possible. Don't let your child know when you're holding and when you're not. Saying "I'm letting go now" is like saying "Look over your shoulder, son (daughter). Panic. You are going to run your bike into that wire fence."

Now you will see why the wide-open spaces are important. Your young novice bicyclist will dip, loop, zigzag, ride in crazy circles. At times it will seem as if your child is in a slow-motion death spiral, when suddenly some invisible hand will push him/her upright. You'll die a thousand times in the next fifteen minutes. And, of course, there will be a few crashes, but it won't be long now.

Your child will still be waiting too long before correcting with the front wheel resulting in a lot of overcorrection. When the ride gets too crazy, it is time to take a break. Keep reinforcing the concept of correcting early.

At some point (you will know when), stop running alongside your youngster and let go. After 50 or 60 yards, your child will realize you're not there and will continue to ride. There is no stopping your child after that.

Your child is very proud and still can't believe it. Allow your child to continue riding to help build confidence, and have fun. You will still have to help your child get on and off the bike.

Show your child how to get on the bike-at a stoop or stair if necessary-and how to brake.

Practice makes perfect - be patient. **Remember, a bike helmet is necessary at all times!**