

Cycling to School



Information for parents and schools

INFORMATION SHEET FS06

Introduction

Cycling is an ideal form of transport for young people providing a healthy, cheap and environmentally friendly way to get about, together with a degree of freedom and independence. Not surprisingly therefore, a high proportion of children in the UK say they would prefer to cycle to school.⁽¹⁾

As cycling is about three times faster than walking, it is perfect for journeys to and from school which are too far to walk, and is an easy way to keep fit. The government recommends that young people should have a minimum of one hour's moderate physical activity each day, to keep healthy and help prevent serious illness in later life. Cycling to school regularly is a simple and practical way of achieving this.⁽²⁾

For more information see the 'Health Benefits' information sheet.

Safety

Some parents and schools are understandably concerned about the volume and speed of road traffic. Sustrans is supporting local authorities in providing suitable routes for children to cycle, such as traffic-free paths, cycle lanes, safe crossings, and traffic calming to reduce vehicle speeds. Where improvements to routes are needed, it is best for parents to work with the school and local authority to devise a school travel plan. This can highlight any cycling related concerns and propose ways to resolve them.

For more information on school travel plans see 'Developing a School Travel Plan' information sheet.

Parents are likely to want to accompany younger children who are cycling. For older children who can cycle to school on their own, parents might still like to check out local routes to establish the safest way to go. Schools or local authorities can help by publishing maps of local 'preferred' routes. Preparing these could be a geography project for the school.



Department for
Transport

The **Safe Routes to Schools** project is co-ordinated by Sustrans and provides support to local authorities, schools and parents. Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

National Cycle Network Centre, 2 Cathedral Square, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5DD



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Cyclist training

It is obviously vital that children can handle their bikes competently, and that they know how to ride safely and with consideration for others. They need to learn about potential hazards and how to deal with traffic safely. A new national standard of cyclist training for children has recently been introduced. This makes clear what children should be able to do after each of three stages:

- Beginner - bicycle control and handling skills, practised off-road
- On-road - experience in traffic on quieter local roads, usually for Year 5 pupils and above
- Advanced - experience on busier roads, designed for secondary school pupils.

For more information on cyclist training visit www.ctc.org.uk

Ask your local road safety department for details of what training is available in your area or at your school. Refresher courses for adults may also be available.

Choosing a bicycle

Children and young people are likely to be more influenced by fashion and outward appearances than by practicality but the main thing is to choose a bike that fits the child well. A bike that is too big can be difficult to control and therefore dangerous so the temptation to buy a bike the child can 'grow into' must be resisted.

For more information on sizing and choosing a bicycle visit www.whycycle.co.uk

Cycle maintenance

Part of cycling safely is ensuring that your bike is roadworthy. It is therefore essential that bikes ridden to school are checked regularly. A quick daily check should include:

- both brakes working
- tyres pumped up, and wheels not wobbling sideways
- handlebars and saddle straight and tight
- both lights working

Children should learn how to carry out these basic safety checks, and know about tyre pressures, adjusting saddles, and mending punctures. Some schools organise safety checks of bikes on site with the help of road safety officers or police, and some run maintenance clubs, or keep spare sets of lights, locks, pumps and repair kits. Schools could hold 'bike doctor' or 'bike MOT' days, for pupils to have their bikes serviced. Local cycle shops are sometimes able to help with these.

Safety equipment and clothing

Most accidents involving cars and cyclists occur at junctions, where the cyclist is not visible enough to the car driver. High visibility clothing, even during daylight hours, and lights during darkness are therefore essential for the safety of children cycling to school. A conventional lamp (not LED) at the front and a non-flashing red lamp at the rear are needed to be both legal and visible. An additional flashing red light worn by the cyclist, not fixed to the bike, is helpful and legal.

Lightweight high visibility waterproof jackets are very useful, and widely available. Reflective armbands, ankle straps, or tabards, and reflective stickers for bikes and bags, can be bought at reasonable cost from bike shops, and are often available from the

local road safety department. Schools sometimes buy them in bulk to save costs and encourage their use.

Cycle helmets are designed to give protection from a fall from a bike (but not withstand collision with a moving vehicle). Sustrans therefore recommends encouraging children to wear them although their use is currently not compulsory. To be effective they must fit and be worn correctly:

- must be a snug fit and remain secure on the head
- should not obstruct the ability to see clearly, or cover the ears
- need to be positioned squarely on the head, sitting just above the eyebrows and not tilted back or tipped forwards
- the straps should be securely fastened and not twisted, with only enough room for two fingers to be inserted between chin and strap.

Always buy a helmet new, not second hand, and make sure it conforms to one of the recognised safety standards, such as BS EN 1078 SNELL CERTIFIED.

For more information on cycle helmets and cycle lights visit www.whycycle.co.uk

Cycle parking

Providing secure cycle parking on the school site is probably the single most effective action a school can take to encourage more pupils to cycle. Both primary and secondary schools have found that pupils and parents are much more willing to consider cycling as an option if they know that bikes will be secure during the day. Cycle racks should be positioned where there is no conflict with pedestrians or vehicles, and where they can be easily seen by people within the school. Funding for racks and shelters is more readily available now.

For more information on the number and type of racks to install, the variety of shelters which are available, and funding opportunities, see 'Cycle Parking for Schools' information sheet and visit our website.

Cycle parking permits

A school cannot legally ban cycling, since the decision about how to get to school and liability for the school journey lies with parents, but schools are entitled to prohibit bikes from being brought onto the school grounds. The Department for Education and Skills has produced guidelines on school travel stating that schools are not liable for children's safety on the journey to school, except where the school has organised transport.⁽³⁾ Neither are schools liable for property brought onto their premises, including pupils' bicycles being stolen or damaged by a third party.⁽³⁾ Schools should therefore make it clear to parents that bicycles stored at school are left at the owner's risk.

A cycle parking permit is an agreement drawn up between pupils, parents and the school, which clarifies conditions and liability for pupils cycling to school and gives permission for pupils to use school cycle parking facilities. Guidelines on cycling behaviour are combined with a consent form which both the pupil and parent or guardian should sign. A school would withdraw permission from any pupil who cycled inconsiderately or irresponsibly. Such cycling behaviour guidelines are far more effective if pupils themselves have helped produce them, which they can do in citizenship lessons.

A template cycle parking permit can be downloaded from our website.



Storage of books and equipment

Children are sometimes put off the idea of cycling to school because they have to carry heavy books, sports kit or other equipment. Panniers fitted to a rack on the bike are the best solution, but a small backpack is often sufficient. Schools can help to reduce the amount carried by providing lockers, where helmets and lights can also be stored during the school day. Where space limits the number of lockers, schools sometimes give priority to cyclists or those who walk the furthest distance.

Insurance

Cycle insurance is sometimes offered as part of a household contents insurance policy. Otherwise parents should arrange separate cycle insurance. A sturdy lock is advisable, and is a requirement of insurance cover for theft. Remember that schools are not liable for theft or damage, even if they provide secure cycle parking facilities.

Case studies

Visit the Case Studies section of our website to see examples of schools which have been able to encourage high levels of safe cycling. With appropriate facilities, training and safeguards, cycling can be a healthy and liberating form of transport for young people.

References

1. Young TransNet online survey: www.youngtransnet.org.uk
2. Health Education Authority (1998) 'Young and Active?' A policy framework for young people and health-enhancing physical activity.
3. DfES, 'Home to School Travel' section of website: www.teachernet.gov.uk



Further information

Visit the Safe Routes to Schools website www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk for:

- latest news and information on Safe Routes to Schools
- specific information on each of the UK regions
- downloadable resources including other information sheets
- case studies, curriculum materials and newsletters

For Safe Routes to Schools enquiries call 0117 915 0100 or email schools@sustrans.org.uk

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