

factsheet

cycle safety

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at www.capt.org.uk together with details of how to obtain them.

Cycling is a healthy and fun activity and one that should be encouraged – but made safer.

How many children are killed or injured in cycling accidents?

Thousands of children and young people are injured every year while out and about on their bikes. The most serious injuries, and deaths, happen when a child cyclist is hit by a car or other vehicle on the road.

In 2006 in Great Britain among children under 16 years, in crashes reported to the police:

- 31 cyclists were killed in road accidents. One was 4 years old, 8 were aged 5 – 9 years and the rest were aged 10 – 15 years
- 503 cyclists under 16 years were seriously injured
- 3,262 cyclists under 16 were hurt less severely in road accidents, suffering injuries such as cuts or bruises.

	Age group (years) – all severities				Total
	0-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	
England	48	306	1,047	2,003	3,404
Scotland	3	37	91	78	209
Wales	3	30	46	73	152
GB	54	373	1,184	2,154	3,765

Five children were killed in Scotland in 2006, 40 were seriously injured and 169 were slightly hurt. In Northern Ireland, no cyclists under 16 were killed, but 13 were seriously injured and 45 were slightly injured in road accidents.

Children also have accidents in areas away from traffic or roads. These injuries occur when children fall off or collide with objects or other people. Most non-traffic cycle injuries are less serious than traffic related injuries but they do result in large numbers of children attending a hospital Accident and Emergency Department. Each year over 2,000 children go to hospital with cycle related injuries that happen at home. A further 21,000 are taken to hospital after hurting themselves on their bikes outside the home in places such as parks or playgrounds.

How can cycling be made safer for children?

Roads can be made safer for all cyclists. Cycle lanes make cycling safer by separating cyclists from other vehicles – although they are very rarely wide enough for an adult to cycle next to a child. Speed restrictions and traffic calming schemes can also make roads safer for all road users.

Having the right safety gear is important. Children should never be allowed out on their bikes without a helmet – not just on the roads but in gardens, parks or playgrounds as well. Seventy per cent of all cycling deaths and over half of all cycling injuries involve a head injury. Cycle helmets are known to be very effective in reducing the risk of head injury but less than a fifth of children under 15 wear helmets.

Bright coloured, reflective or fluorescent clothing is also important to make sure children are seen by other road users, especially at night or in poor weather conditions.

Children should be taught to look after their bikes; parents should help them check brakes, reflectors, lights and tyre pressures regularly.

The height of the saddle should also be looked at to make sure it is set at the right height for the child using it. The balls of the feet should just touch the ground when the child is sitting on the bike.

Choosing a safe place to cycle

Accidents can happen anywhere which is why it is so important that children always wear their helmets. Cycle paths, parks, gardens or other play areas away from traffic are however usually the safest option – particularly for young children.

Learning to be a safe cyclist

Children are not able to judge the speed of other traffic. It also takes experience to learn how to control a bike. Adults should always accompany younger children on the roads to teach them how to choose a safer route, position themselves safely on the road and make correct hand signals for turning or slowing down. Children vary in their ability to control a bike and understand road safety but they unlikely to be able to cycle safely in traffic without adult supervision until they are about 11 years old.

Further help and advice

Your local council's road safety officers should be able to tell you what cycle training schemes are available in your area. Some schools also run cycling schemes for children wanting to use their bikes to get to school. The following national organisations may also be able to tell you about initiatives to help children stay safer on their bikes.

Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust
First Floor, 43-45 Milford Road
Reading
Berkshire RG1 8LG

tel 0118 958 3585

www.bhit.org

CTC the national cyclists organisation
Parklands
Railton Road
Guildford GU2 9JX

tel 0870 607 0415

www.ctc.org.uk/cycletraining

Bikeability

To find out about Bikeability near you, visit
tinyurl.com/3p84ox

The Department for Transport produce information as part of their Hedgehogs Campaign see www.hedgehogs.gov.uk/arrivealive for advice on safe cycling.

Child Accident Prevention Trust has information on fitting cycle helmets correctly and on safe cycling. Contact us at the address below or see capt's website for more information.

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