

# Cycling to school

Information for parents and schools



## Key facts

Benefits of cycling to school:

- reduces traffic congestion around school gates
- can lead to improved academic performance
- helps children develop independence
- increases levels of physical activity
- is sustainable and cheap
- it's fun!

## Introduction

Cycling is great for young people. It's a cheap, fast and environmentally friendly way to get about. It also helps them to increase physical activity, gain independence and engage with their local community. It's no surprise that whilst only 2% of UK children cycle to school, half of them would like to.<sup>(1)</sup>

By 2050 it is predicted that 70% of girls and 55% of boys will be overweight or obese.<sup>(2)</sup> The government recommends that in order to maintain a healthy weight and to help prevent serious illness in later life, young people should have a minimum of one hour's

moderate physical activity each day. Cycling to school regularly is a simple, practical and enjoyable way of achieving this.

Sustrans' School Travel website contains loads of information and resources to help encourage and enable young people to cycle safely to school. Visit [www.sustrans.org.uk/schooltravel](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/schooltravel).

## Cycle training

Children must learn to ride safely, competently and considerately, and need to learn about potential hazards and road positioning to ensure maximum safety. Bikeability (cycle training which delivers the National Standards) teaches cycling skills in three stages:

- Level 1 – Basic bicycle control and handling skills in a traffic-free environment
- Level 2 – Experience in traffic on quieter roads, usually for Year 5 pupils and above
- Level 3 – Tackling more challenging traffic situations (designed for secondary pupils).

In England visit [www.bikeability.org.uk](http://www.bikeability.org.uk) to get cycle training started in your school.

Scottish authorities deliver a three-level training programme for Primary 5, 6 and 7. Cycling Scotland is responsible for supporting its delivery and provides resources, training and funding. Contact [info@cyclingscotland.org](mailto:info@cyclingscotland.org) for details.

In Wales, local authorities are supported by the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver cycle training to the National Standards. Visit the [www.roadsafetywales.org.uk](http://www.roadsafetywales.org.uk) for information about what is available in your local area.

In Northern Ireland cycle training is provided through the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Programme. Speak to your Road Safety Officer for more information. Visit [www.roadsafetyni.org.uk](http://www.roadsafetyni.org.uk) for contact details.

## Choosing a bike

It is important to choose a bike that fits the child well. A bike that is too big can be difficult to control and therefore dangerous. Resist the temptation to buy a bike the child can 'grow into'. Sustrans also has online advice for choosing your perfect bike. Search [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk) for our **Cycling with children** and **Get cycling** booklets.

### Safety checklist for cyclists

- Stay visible wearing hi-vis where possible ✓
- Maintain your bike ✓
- Never listen to music or talk on the phone ✓
- Plan your route carefully ✓
- Carry a charged mobile phone with credit ✓
- Ensure bike lights are working ✓
- Make sure helmets are correctly fitted ✓
- Read our *Staying safe on the school journey* infosheet ✓

## Safety

Cycling to school is a perfect opportunity for young people to develop vital road safety skills. The health benefits of cycling greatly outweigh the risks involved – regular cyclists are as fit as an average person 10 years younger.

However, road safety concerns about the volume and speed of traffic are one of the main reasons why parents choose to drive their children to school.

### [www.20splentyforus.org.uk](http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk)

This campaign aims to reduce speed limits and has been adopted by many parts of the UK. A London survey showed that the introduction of 20 mph zones was associated with a 42% reduction in road casualties between 1986 and 2006<sup>(9)</sup>.

Sustrans supports local authorities in providing suitable routes for children to cycle. Through our Links to Schools project, we have helped develop routes and

installed features including traffic-free paths, safe crossings and traffic-calming measures. Where route improvements are needed, it's best for parents to work with the school and local authority to develop a School Travel Plan (STP) to highlight concerns and propose solutions.

**Tip** See our Developing a School Travel Plan infosheet for further details. <http://tinyurl.com/STPinfosheet>

Schools and local authorities can help identify the safest routes to school by publishing local maps. Involve the pupils by preparing maps of safe routes as a Geography project. To see all the on-road and traffic-free routes near you, go to [www.sustrans.org.uk/map](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/map) and enter your postcode.

**Tip** For more on safety, read our **Staying safe on the school journey** infosheet. <http://tinyurl.com/safetyinfosheet>

## Maintenance and Dr Bike days

Bikes ridden to school should be roadworthy and checked regularly. Use the M-check to check five points of your bike following an M shape:

**Tip** Bike It schools run Dr Bike maintenance sessions. To run your own, contact your local authority or bike shop to see if they can help.

- Is the saddle secure?
- Is the seatpost beyond the minimum level?

- Is the front stem tight on the frame?

- Is the rear wheel secure?
- Does it run straight?
- Is the quick release lever firmly tightened?
- Are the brake pads worn?
- Are the brake pads aligned correctly on the wheel rim?
- Is the tyre pressure correct?



- Are the cranks loose?
- Are the pedals loose?

- Is the front wheel secure?
- Does it run straight?
- Is the quick release level firmly tightened?
- Are the brake pads worn?
- Are the brake pads aligned correctly on the wheel rim?
- Is the tyre pressure correct?

## Equipment and clothing

Cyclists should be as visible as possible to other road users and pedestrians. Confident road positioning (as taught through cycle training), high visibility clothing, and lights and reflectors are great ways to do this. A white front light and red rear light (constant or flashing) are legal requirements when cycling in the dark. An additional red flashing rear light attached to the cyclist's arm, bag or clothing is also helpful.

Lightweight, high visibility waterproof jackets are useful and widely available. Reflective bands, tabards and stickers for bikes, bags and clothing are available from bike shops or local road safety departments. Schools can often buy in bulk to save costs and encourage use. Cycle helmets are designed to give protection from a fall. Though not compulsory, Sustrans recommends encouraging children to wear them. Helmets must be fitted correctly to be effective. Visit [www.whycycle.co.uk](http://www.whycycle.co.uk) for advice about fitting helmets.

Always buy a helmet new, not second hand and replace it after a fall. Make sure it conforms to the current UK safety standard **BS EN 1078:1997**.

**Tip** For help with helmets and lights read Sustrans' Get Cycling booklet online.

<http://tinyurl.com/sustransgetcycling>

Carrying heavy books and equipment is often viewed as a barrier to cycling. Panniers fitted to a rack on the bike are the best solution, although often a small backpack is sufficient. Schools can help by providing lockers, and could perhaps give priority to cyclists or those who walk the furthest distance.



## Cycle parking

Pupils and parents are much more willing to consider cycling as an option if secure cycle parking is provided at school.

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. Our **Finding Funding** guide – available to download from our online **Toolkit** – contains advice about funding for school travel projects like cycle parking, and lists grant-giving organisations. Contact your local authority for ideas about local sources of funding you could use.

**Tip** For a step-by-step guide to choosing the right cycle storage for your school, see our **Cycle Parking for Schools** infosheet. <http://tinyurl.com/cyclestorage>



## Rights and permits

A school can't legally ban cycling – they're only responsible for children's safety on the school journey where they have specifically arranged transport – but they can ban bikes from their grounds.

Schools are not liable for stolen or damaged property, including bikes, brought onto their premises. They should therefore make it clear to parents that bicycles stored at school are left at the owner's risk.

Some schools implement cycle permits – agreements drawn up between pupils, parents and the school – which clarify guidelines on cycling behaviour, liability and use of school cycle parking facilities. Permits may be withdrawn if pupils cycle irresponsibly. A cycle permit template can be found in our online **Toolkit**.

For more information, resources, FAQs and case studies, visit

[www.sustrans.org.uk/schooltravel](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/schooltravel)

## Insurance and locks

Cycle insurance can be included in household contents insurance policies, or parents can arrange separate cycle insurance. A sturdy D-lock is advisable, and is a requirement of insurance cover for theft.

**Top tips** for locking your bike:

1. Use a good lock (D lock with a separate cable is best)
2. Make sure your bike is locked to a stand or strong object that can't be moved
3. Always lock the frame and at least one wheel to the stand
4. Take easily removed items, like lights, with you.

Visit <http://quickrelease.tv/?p=327> to watch a short film demonstrating the most secure ways to lock your bike.

## Case study

### Warden Hill Junior School, Luton

When Bike It officer Richard Noon began working with a school in Luton there was no cycle storage and no cycling pupils. Bikes were simply toys, parked up in the garage or garden shed. Eighteen months on, the school has a new cycle shelter and fifty pupils cycle to school regularly.

The school has seen a dramatic increase in the number of pupils who cycle.

Headteacher Mark Welch says; "We were keen to work with Sustrans to help pupils become safe and confident cyclists as well as developing independence, environmental awareness and health related skills. Cycling has helped support all these, and other, important areas of personal development."

## About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today. [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

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## References

- (1) Sustrans (2010) Bike It Project Review
- (2) Mackett, P. (2004) Making Children Healthier Through Walking
- (3) British Medical Journal (2009) Effect of 20mph traffic speed zones on road injuries in London