

Bicycle safety rules can help protect your child

The wing safety office offers the following tips for children who ride their bicycles on base:

1. Never ride out into a street without stopping first.

Kids must learn to stop, look left, look right, look left again and listen to be sure no cars are coming before entering a street. Look left that second time because cars coming from the left are on the child's side of the street and are closer. Use your driveway or sidewalk to demonstrate this way to enter a street. Have the child practice the entry, looking left, looking right and looking left again. Make sure that they understand that because they see a car does not mean the driver sees them. They must always assume that the driver has not.

2. Obey stop signs.

Nearly a third of the car-bike crashes with a young child occur when a child rides through a stop sign or red light without yielding to crossing traffic. Kids must learn to stop, look left, look right, then look left again at all stop signs, stop lights and intersections before crossing. Make sure they know the basics about stop signs and stop lights. Take your child to a controlled intersection and practice crossing safely. Explain that when riding in a group, each bicyclist must stop and make sure it is clear before crossing, (see Rule 4 below) Teach young children to walk their bikes through busy intersections. Remind them it is the law to obey traffic signals even when no one appears to be coming. While you are at it, explain one-way streets to them too.

3. Check behind you before swerving, turning or changing lanes.

Nearly a third of the car-bike crashes involv-

ing children occur when a child turns suddenly into the path of faster moving traffic. Kids must learn to look behind them, signal and look behind again before swerving, turning or changing lanes. The best place to practice this is in a quiet parking lot or playground. Stand behind them while they ride along a straight painted line. Hold up numbered cards and have them practice looking back over their shoulder and telling you the number on the card — without swerving off the painted line. Children should not be allowed to ride their bikes on the street alone until they have mastered this skill.

4. Never follow another rider without applying the rules.

Many fatalities occur when the first rider violates one of the three rules above and the second one blindly follows. The statistic shows one of the three rules above caused the crash, but the real reason was following another rider. Running stop signs or red lights, riding out of driveways or zipping across lanes all seem natural to the second child because they are more focussed on following the other rider than on the rules. This will not be an easy lesson to absorb!

5. Before you get on your bike, put on a helmet.

Every year more than 800 people die in the U.S. from bicycle crashes. Most of them die from head injuries. Some suffer brain damage, which can cause learning disabilities, personality changes and rob your child of the ability to think clearly.

Hospital emergency room studies show that a helmet can prevent about 85 percent of head injuries. Parents are advised not to allow their

children to ride a bike without a helmet, even on their block, on the sidewalk or on a bike trail. The fall is from the same height wherever they ride. *(Submitted by the wing safety office.)*

More tips and facts

How your helmet should fit

In some states, the law says you have to wear a bike helmet to ride your bike. Bike helmets should fit like this:

- 1) sits evenly between the ears
- 2) sits low on your forehead

See and Be Seen

Ride so cars can see you. Wear bright colors or clothes that reflect light at night so cars, buses, and trucks can see you.

If you ride at night, get a headlight for the front of your bike and "reflectors" on the front and back of your bike.

Follow the Rules

Bikes have to follow the same traffic rules and signs as cars. You must ride in the same direction as the cars are going. Ride your bike single-file.

Signal when you want to stop or turn.

Look out for holes, wet leaves, or cracks in the street. They can make you crash your bike.

Ride away from the curb in case a car pulls out or someone opens a car door suddenly.

For more information on bicycle safety, call the wing safety office at 963-5606.