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What to Teach Your Children About Riding a Bicycle

Dear Parents:

This year, we have added a bicycle skills component to our Bicycle Rodeo. This component of the rodeo will help your child with learning basic bicycle handling skills and behavior that will reduce their risk as they eventually learn to share the road with motor vehicles. Today, we can only teach them what they need to know for safe bicycling. **It is important that you practice these skills and reinforce these behaviors at home with your children!**

You can help your child by following them through these skill exercises, and learn the concepts that are taught. At home, please take a few minutes and observe your child's bicycling skills, share a ride with them around the neighborhood, and reinforce the important skills and concepts they learn here.

Today, they will begin by learning some basic bicycling skills such as how to start and stop a bicycle, where to ride in the roadway, how to ride in a straight line and look for traffic, and how to recognize and avoid hazards.

These are five simple and easy bicycling behaviors that should be reinforced at home:

1. Stop and look before entering a road or street

Young bicyclists become accustomed to riding out of their driveway into a neighborhood street without looking. Usually, these are streets with very little traffic. Unfortunately, this poor behavior puts the young bicyclist at risk when a motorist unexpectedly passes by, and the risk gets worse when the your children begin to travel on heavier trafficked streets and intersections.

ACTION – Develop good habits by requiring your younger children to walk to the end of the driveway and to look in both directions before entering the street. On family rides, bring your children to intersections with stop signs and have them practice searching for traffic and proceeding across the intersection when it is clear.

2. Ride on the right side of the street

The greatest number of bicyclist/motor vehicle accidents occurs when the bicyclist is traveling on the wrong side of the roadway against traffic. The motorist, while looking to the left to make

a right hand turn at an intersection or driveway, collides with the bicyclist approaching on the wrong side of the street where they are not expected.

ACTION – Emphasis riding on the right side of the roadway with traffic. If a young bicyclist rides on a sidewalk of heavily trafficked street, make sure they stop, search and yield to traffic at all intersection and busy driveways.

3. Ride in a straight line and look before turning or changing direction

Young bicyclists too often make sudden left turns in front of approaching motorists. This situation occurs when they are avoiding a hazard in the roadway, they are following the actions of other bicyclists, or when they are simply distracted.

ACTION – During family rides, have your children practice riding in a straight line and practice scanning before turning. Remind them to make their own traffic decisions and not to blindly follow the actions of others.

4. Ride only during daylight hours

Bicyclists need to be prepared to ride a bicycle at dusk or night. Bright reflective clothing and lighting is required in order to be visible to approaching motorists. This is especially important when riding on higher speed rural roadways.

ACTION – It is best to prohibit your younger children from riding a bicycle at night until they have become skilled and understand the risk and skills associated with riding at night.

5. Wear a helmet

Most bicycle accidents do not involve a motorist. Crashes can happen in driveways, streets, parking lots, fields, bicycle trails and just about anywhere. Bicyclists not wearing a helmet are taking an unnecessary risk.

ACTION –Purchase a helmet at the same time you purchase a bicycle for your child. Have them understand that they are inseparable. And, most importantly, wear a helmet yourself! You are your child's role model.

- Safe Travels

PaTHs 4 Bethlehem Committee - 2010
(Pathways To Homes, Hamlets & Healthy Hearts)