**Summary**

- Young children need adult help in the road environment and regular opportunities to develop and practise skills together with adults.
- Children learn road safety habits by watching and copying others, so set a good example.
- Talk with your child about roads, signs, traffic, and how and where to cross the road safely.
- In Victoria, it is compulsory for adults and children to wear an approved Australian Standards helmet while riding a bicycle.
- Make sure you choose the right helmet for your child and that it is fitted correctly.
- Regularly maintain your child’s bicycle for safety.
- Give your child lots of riding practice and teach them riding skills.
- Make sure the bicycle is the right size for your child – a bike that is too big or small can be dangerous.

In their early years, children need lots of assistance from adults to manage the considerable risks associated with road use. They need particular help in detecting the presence of traffic and judging the speed and distance of oncoming traffic. As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road and bicycle users.

**Helping children to be safe around traffic**

Road safety skills are best learnt in the real traffic environment. Children learn primarily by experience and adult interaction helps them to learn. You can help by talking with your child as you ride. Ask questions about roads, signs, traffic, and how and where you can ride safely.

To help your child become a safe cyclist, let them practise often on footpaths and offer tips on how to ride safely. Children need to develop the skills to be able to ride in a straight line, brake properly and turn corners safely.

Ride in designated areas such as bicycle paths when possible. By law, children under 12 years of age can ride on the footpath, and adults can too when they are supervising them. Find out if your child's school offers 'Bike Ed', which teaches children about road safety and cycling skills.

**Bicycle safety for children under five**

Always carefully supervise children in traffic situations. It is important to:

- Talk with your child about the traffic environment.
- Explain what you are doing when you cross the road together. Involve your child in deciding when it is safe to cross the road – of course you still make the decision, but you are teaching your child to think in the traffic environment.
- Always be a good role model for your child by obeying road rules and crossing roads safely.
- Make eye contact with road users, especially at intersections.
- Involve your child in choosing safe places to ride.
- Make sure your child always rides on the footpath or a bicycle path with adult supervision.
- Make certain that your child wears an approved Australian Standards helmet when riding a bike.
- Ask if your child's early childhood service includes road safety education in the program.

**Bicycle safety for children between five and nine**

Your child still needs adult supervision and assistance in the traffic environment. It is important to:

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- Talk together about signs and traffic lights. Identify and discuss places where it is safe to cross the road.
- Teach your child how to cross roads using the 'stop, look, listen and think' process – stop at the kerb, look and listen for traffic and then decide whether it is safe to cross. Take the trip to school together along the safest footpaths and use safe crossing places, such as pedestrian crossings and on straight sections of road.
- Supervise your child on the way to and from school.
- Always be a good role model for your child by obeying road rules and crossing roads safely.
- Children under 12 years of age should not cycle on the road, and they should be accompanied by a competent adult when riding on a footpath or bike path. (You can ride with your child on footpaths while they are younger than 12 years old.)
- Make certain that your child wears an approved Australian Standards helmet when riding a bike.
- Ask at your child's school what road safety programs are being taught.

**Bicycle safety for children between 10 and 13**

Children between 10 and 13 can cope more safely in traffic on their own. This will depend, however, on how much practice the child has had in the 'real traffic' environment. It is important to:

- Check that your child always 'stops, looks, listens and thinks' when crossing the road. Ask them to explain to you what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- Talk with your child about road laws. Go for regular rides together.
- Plan a safe route to school with your child, and to places your child often visits.
- Talk with your child about where they can safely ride.
- Children under 12 years of age should not cycle on the road and they should be accompanied by a competent adult when riding on a footpath or bike path.
- Make certain your child wears an approved Australian Standards bicycle helmet.
- Make sure your child wears bright colours that can be easily seen by other road users.
- Always be a good role model for your child by obeying road rules and crossing roads safely.

**Bicycle helmets for children**

Bicycle helmets are effective in protecting child cyclists against head, brain and facial injuries. Wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by 60 to 90 per cent. It is compulsory to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle in Victoria on any road or road-related area like a bike path, bike lane, shared footpath or separated footpath. Tricycles with a pedal and chain are considered bicycles under the road rules.

Your child's helmet should be:

- approved – make sure the helmet carries the Australian Standard mark, showing that it is safety approved and meets the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2063
- the right size and correctly fitted – the helmet should be comfortable and not too tight or loose. Caps should not be worn under helmets as they ruin the fit – your child can wear a visor over the helmet to protect them from the sun. Choose a helmet that is not too heavy and provides good ventilation
- positioned properly – the helmet should sit level on the rider's head, covering the forehead with the rim just above the eyebrows. The straps should be correctly adjusted and the buckle securely fastened. The straps should form a "V" shape with the plastic strap guide sitting just under the earlobe. Make sure straps are not twisted. The buckle should be close up under your child's chin
- kept in good condition – a helmet is designed to protect a person's head for one impact only. If the helmet has been involved in an accident or if it has been dropped from a height, you must replace it, even if there is no visible damage. Do not leave a helmet exposed to direct sunlight when not in use. Make sure the foam is not old and crumbling, and clean the helmet according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**Choosing a suitable bicycle for your child**

Having a bicycle of the right size for the rider's body plays a big part in safe cycling. A bicycle that is too big for your child is dangerous. Do not buy a bicycle or helmet that is too large for your child, with the intention that they will 'grow into it'.
To test for size, stand your child over the bicycle with both feet on the ground. For medium or lightweight bicycles, there should be at least 2 cm between the child's crotch and the crossbar (or where the crossbar would be if the bicycle had one). For BMX and mountain bicycles, there should be at least 5 cm between the child's crotch and the bicycle crossbar.

Make sure all controls are within easy reach and comfortable to use, and that the seat can be adjusted. If you buy a second-hand bicycle, get it serviced properly.

**Bicycle passenger seats for children**

To use a bicycle passenger seat for a child safely:

- Check the age or weight restrictions described by the manufacturer of the bicycle passenger seat.
- Choose a seat with moulded leg supports (to protect the child's feet from the wheel spokes), head and neck support, foot straps and spoke shields.
- Make sure the seat has a harness and that you fit it securely each time you place the child in the seat.
- Make sure your child wears an approved Australian Standards bicycle helmet when riding in a bicycle seat.

**Bicycle trailers and the associated road rules**

A bicycle trailer refers to a vehicle that is built to be, or is, towed behind a bicycle. A cyclist must not tow a bicycle trailer with a person in or on the bicycle trailer, unless all of the following apply:

- the cyclist is 16 years of age or older
- the passenger is under 10 years of age
- the bicycle trailer can safely carry the passenger
- the passenger is wearing an approved Australian Standards bicycle helmet securely fitted and fastened on their head.

There are some exemptions (Road Safety Road Rules 2009, reg. 257(4)) to allow an older passenger to ride in a trailer including if a disability or medical condition makes it desirable.

**Caring for your child's bicycle**

Make sure that your bicycle and your child's bicycle are well maintained. Regularly check brakes, wheels, pedals, bearings and chains so that the bicycle will stop quickly in an emergency. Each time you ride the bicycle, check if the tyres are hard, if the brakes work and whether there are any rattles. Check the tyres, bearings, gears, nuts and bolts, and lubricate the chain and cables each week.

See a professional bicycle mechanic if you are unsure about the bicycle's safety.

**Where to get help**

- [Community Information (formerly Safety Centre), The Royal Children's Hospital](tel:0393455085) Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- [VicRoads](tel:0383768888) or [1800 639 634]
- [Bicycle Network Victoria](tel:0383768888) or [1800 639 634]
- [RACV](tel:0397902190) Tel. (03) 9790 2190

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