

Tips for on-road cycling with the family

Cycling is a great family activity. It's fun, safe, and the perfect way to have an everyday adventure. The cycle path network is a great place to start, but riding on roads to link up parts of your journey can also be hugely liberating and enjoyable.

Typically, children in P6 will undertake Bikeability Scotland on-road training to develop their skills and understanding of road safety. However, younger children who can follow instructions can also ride on the road as part of a family group.

One technique we promote to our instructors and tutors is called '**shepherding**' – the practice of moving a maximum of three riders safely and effectively on the road using one trained instructor/leader. We've prepared these notes specifically for family groups, led by one responsible adult, based on our '**shepherding**' guidelines.

You may also want to organise a 2.5 hour **Adult Cycle Training - Family cycling** session – contact [info@cyclingscot](mailto:info@cyclingscot.org) for more information about this course.

Cycling Scotland is the nation's cycling organisation. Working with others, we help create and deliver opportunities and an environment so anyone anywhere in Scotland can cycle easily and safely.

We strongly believe that cycle training should be tailored to the needs of the individual, and are committed to making our courses as inclusive as possible. Our tutors can provide support for adapting cycle training so if you would like to discuss a specific request, please contact us at [info@cyclingscot](mailto:info@cyclingscot.org)



Before your ride



Before any ride there are a few things to consider:

- Where do you plan to go? (how long, how far, what route, etc.)
- Does everyone have what they need? (roadworthy bike, appropriate clothes)
- What will you do if there is an incident?
- Does everyone have the capability to do the ride?

Where do you plan to go?

Think about where you can go from your front door (this is much easier than trying to transport bikes). Is there some green space accessible? Can you get there without using busier roads? Will there be a lot of hills on the way? Your journey should be suitable for the least capable member of your family, but might involve an extension for older siblings to burn off steam, such as a park, public running track or empty playground.

Once you have identified your route, discuss it with your children so they know what to expect.

Does everyone have what they need?

When riding on the road, everyone should have a bicycle in good repair. A quick way to test this is an 'M-check' – as demonstrated in our [Bikeability Scotland video](#). After repeating this a couple of times, you can even ask your children to lead you through the process.

Consider what you will be wearing. It might feel warm in a sheltered garden, but do you have enough layers if it is cooler outside or starts to rain? Children lose heat quicker than adults in cold conditions. Tuck any baggy trousers into socks and avoid long or trailing clothes that could get caught in the wheels.

It's always worth carrying a couple of snacks and water for when energy and enthusiasm starts to flag too!

What will you do if there is an incident?

Before setting off, consider some scenarios. If someone has a puncture or other problem can you fix it yourself, or will you be close enough to walk home? If someone has a fall, do you have anything to dress wounds before getting home? Carry a bike lock in case you need to walk children home and return for bikes later. Carry a phone for emergencies.

Does everyone have the capability to do the ride?

You can practise control skills including braking on your driveway (if you have one) or on a quiet street outside your house. Watch our [Bikeability Scotland level 1 video](#), or [download our games book](#) for some fun garden ideas.

When you go out as a family on the roads you cannot expect children to be part of the decision-making process, but you need to rely on them to follow instructions like 'slow down', 'stop', or the troublesome 'left' and 'right'. Think of alternatives in advance: if your child has a bell on the left side of their handlebars this could be 'bell side', or add different coloured tape beside each grip.

Ready to go

Parents can use 'shepherding' to cycle with up to three children.

With practise, shepherding is a useful skill to lead your family group through problematic areas of your ride. Ideally, you should discuss any problematic areas you may encounter at the start of your ride.

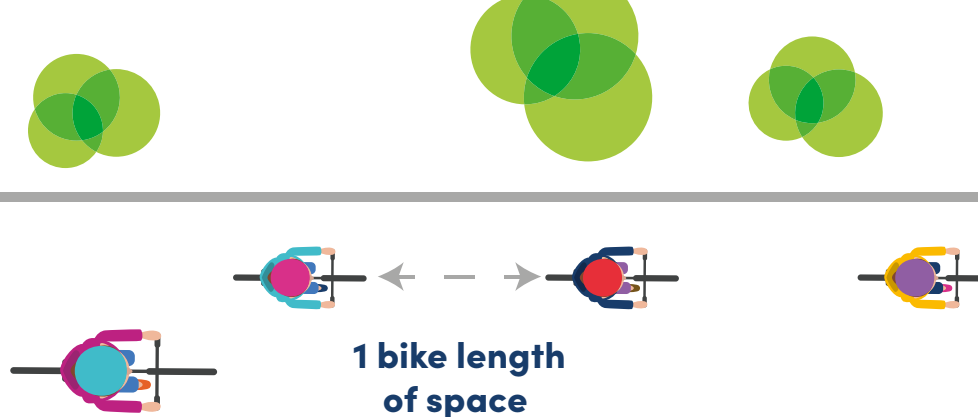
Your aim is for the whole group to flow through junctions, with you taking all the responsibility to deal with changing traffic situations. Your children should be following your instructions, but never expected to make decisions. At busier junctions you may feel more comfortable stopping and walking children across the road.

Agree some rules with your children:

- If you call out an instruction they need to listen – you might want to agree a signal for 'quiet' in advance.
- Stay in position - no overtaking.
- Leave enough space to brake if the rider in front slows down.
- Both hands need to be on the handlebars and covering the brakes.
- If anyone needs to stop, they can.

All on-road cycling is based on four core functions:

- Making good and frequent observations.
- Choosing and maintaining the most suitable riding positions.
- Understanding priorities.
- Communicating/signalling intentions to others.



A handy reminder is **COPPS** (Control, Observe, Position, Priority, Signal). Control refers to bike handling skills you have tested before you set off.

As the leader of the group, you should review the core functions as you pedal.

It is your responsibility to make all signals to other road users. Children might like to copy these but be careful this does not lead to confusion.

If you are out with two adults, one of you should take the front and the 'leader' the rear. Always put your strongest rider at the rear and the weakest at the front. Position yourself where you can see everyone in your group. The best place is usually riding on the right-hand side of the rider at the back.

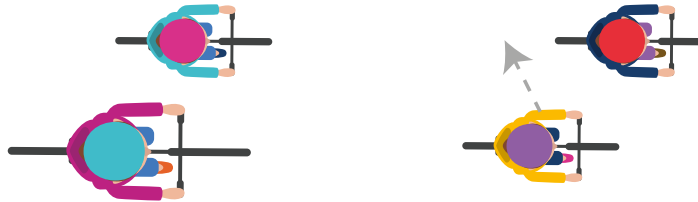
You will need to move around, especially at junctions, to ensure you can make good observations.

- As you approach a junction, you will always want to move towards the front to decide when to cross.
- After you have crossed a junction, hold out your left hand and point to the road position you want your children to use beside you before dropping back.

Always keep your group together. For example, at a give-way junction, you should only start crossing or turning when everyone can do so safely together.



On the road



Shepherding checklist

- Can you see the road ahead and your family?
- What do you need to communicate with your children, and other road users?
- Are there any hazards on the road ahead – do you need to change your position in the group?
- Do you have enough time to make a decision, or is it safer for everyone to move to the side and stop?

Single file or two abreast?

To enjoy the social side of cycling you may prefer to ride side by side, in pairs, on quiet roads. On narrow roads this also protects your space until it is safe for someone to overtake.

If you do choose to ride two abreast, be sure that your children can also move into single file when instructed. To do this, the rider on the right should move behind the rider on the left (apart from you, the leader).

If there is enough space to let traffic past, ride in single file with the leader at the back.

Rural roads?

If you are riding outside of town on rural roads there are a few other road users to look out for:

- Large farm vehicles: Be aware that farm vehicle drivers may have reduced vision of the space around them, and also take up more room on the road, so extra care should be taken around these vehicles. It's often best to dismount and let them pass.
- Horses: They can be easily startled by passing riders so they should be approached slowly, and you should let the horse and their rider know you are coming by saying/calling hello. Make sure you give the horse plenty of room as you pass.
- People walking: As with passing horses, communicate and approach slowly and leave as much room as possible between your group and others.