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Learning to ride a bike

Riding a bike is one of life's amazing pleasures. Few people will have forgotten the first moments of mastering the skill ... a bit shaky at first, then away with the breeze in your hair and a huge smile on your face.

But for so many children – and adults – learning to ride a bike is a traumatic rather than an enjoyable experience.

Too often, Mum and Dad push too hard - often literally - and little Johnny learns, perhaps for the first time, not to trust his parents too much as they promise to hold on ... then let go, with usually predictable results.

Sometimes children miss out altogether and cycling, like swimming, can be embarrassing to learn as an adult.

The method below is probably the best way to show anyone how to ride.

1 Ensure the learner can touch the ground, preferably flat footed. Remove any stabilisers. Take the pedals off the bike, remembering the left-hand pedal has a reverse thread and should be unscrewed clockwise. Pop the pedals and spanner in a carrier bag to take with you. Note that the pedals are marked L and R for left and right, usually near the thread.

2 Find a quiet, flat area in which to practise. Get the learner to "hobby horse" the bike – basically walking with the bike beneath – treating it like one of the early walking machines that developed into today's cycle. Show him or her the brakes and make sure they can use them.

3 Find a slight slope preferably with a grassy area at the bottom. Encourage the learner to go up nine or ten feet and then hobby horse down. If they pick up enough speed, get them to lift their feet clear of the cranks. Try this several times, increasing the distance the learner travels.

4 When the learner is happy with Step 3, fit the pedals back on to the bike (remember that reverse thread!). Let them go back up the slope and repeat Step 3, asking them to rest their feet on the pedals the first time, then spin the pedals gently.

5 Usually by this stage, the learner will be away - and it is just a question of gaining confidence. don't forget that starting on the flat will be a new experience. Show the learner how to lift the right or left pedal to the one o'clock position and push off; compared with balancing, this trick is usually easily mastered.

6 Enjoy your cycling – and let me CCC if this method works for you.

- As a footnote, mums and dads may like to look out for an older cycle on which to teach a child. Well-made bikes from the 1960s and 1970s often had shorter cranks and a better geometry for children. However, watch for cycles which are rusty: they may have rust inside the tubes, which make them dangerous.