



SOUTH VALLEY
BICYCLE
COALITION
www.southvalleybike.org

B I C Y C L I N G

FAQs

FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS

Q. What legal rights do bicyclists have on the road?

A. The Uniform Vehicle Code and the vehicle codes of all 50 states give bicyclists the same rights and *responsibilities* as motorists. That includes you and your kids (there's no limitation as to age). There is good reason behind these sensible laws: every study ever done has shown that bicyclists are far safer when they ride with and act like other traffic, following the same rules.

Q. Aren't bicyclists safer on the sidewalk than they are on the street?

A. No. Even on the sidewalk, bicyclists have to cross paths with driveways and with streets at intersections. Motorists are conditioned to check the street when pulling out or turning, not the sidewalk, especially the sidewalk to their right. Studies show that cyclists who ride on the sidewalk have about five times the number of crashes as those who ride with and act like other traffic on the street, following traffic laws and behaving predictably.

Q. Do bicyclists always have to ride as far to the right of the road as possible?

A. No. Cyclists are required to ride as far to the right as *practicable*, and there are many exceptions even to this rule. The law leaves latitude for cyclists to use their judgment.

Often cyclists need to ride out farther in the road — not to block traffic, but to increase visibility and safety, and to help traffic flow. Some examples: when approaching a place where a right turn is authorized (so they won't be cut off by right turning motorists); when preparing for a left turn; when passing other cyclists or motorists; when necessary to avoid hazards or other road or traffic conditions; when roads merge or diverge; when the lane is too narrow to share with motorists; when the lane is extremely wide.

Q. Will a bicycling class turn me or my child into a highly proficient cyclist?

A. No. That takes time and practice. However, a cycling class gives you and/or your child some very important knowledge and a good start at practicing the skills needed to reduce risk and ride predictably, but — just as teenagers do after finishing driver's ed — bicyclists need to practice regularly, and that's where you come in.

Q. What bicycling skills can I help my children learn?

A. Start with these four skills:

- 1) Starting safely, riding a straight line, and stopping safely.
- 2) Stopping, looking and yielding when pulling into the street and at intersections (not doing this is the number one cause of car-bike accidents for kids ages 6-12). Also, if little ones do ride on the sidewalk, teach them to check driveways and the street at driveways for cars entering and exiting.
- 3) Scanning ahead for traffic and other hazards, and scanning back over their left shoulder for overtaking traffic while riding in a straight line. This is something that must be done before any movement left, and you can't bicycle safely without it.
- 4) Rules for stop signs and lights, and rules of right-of-way, especially 4-way stops, which can be complicated for kids.

(80% of all accidents happen at intersections, so concentrate heavily on what to do at intersections)

Note: Some large intersections in Bakersfield have lights that are timed to allow cars to get through, but that can turn red again before kids on bikes can get through, especially if there are no cars behind them to keep the signal sensors tripped. If your child will be crossing one of these where they regularly ride, they can get through by getting off their bike and using the pedestrian crosswalk, then getting back on at the other side. We are working with the city to correct the problem, but it's not solved yet, so be aware.

Q. What can I do to help my child develop his/her bicycling skills?

A. The best thing you can do is ride with them and model the right behavior. Read the information on this and other advocacy and education web sites, then contact a League Certified Bicycling Instructor to sign up for a class yourself. Kids learn by doing something and watching an adult do it right. Remember, this is their very first introduction to the world of traffic rules, so they need your help. Kids whose parents learn the rules and ride with them regularly have *significantly* better skills than kids whose parents don't.

Another way to help is to explain the rules of the road and why you do what you do when you're driving around town in the car (but don't substitute this for riding with them.)

Q. At what age is my child ready to ride to school or around town on their own?

A. There is no magic age. Every child is different, so this is a decision you as a parent will have to make based on your assessment of your child's skills and readiness. As you ride with your child, you will see them grow more confident and it should not be difficult to judge when they are ready to venture out on their own. Most schools let children in third grade and older ride to school. This does not mean, however, that all third graders are capable cyclists. Use your judgement and don't extend your child beyond their level of ability.

Q. Why do so many cyclists (even adults) ride against traffic, or ride on the sidewalk, or do other things that make them unpredictable and increase their risk?

A. From about 1930 to about 1970 very few adults in America bicycled, and that was long enough for some very erroneous ideas about bicycle safety to take hold — among them an irrational fear of cars, the idea that bicyclists should ride against traffic, ride on the sidewalk, etc. Fortunately things are changing and education is improving the situation.

Q. Isn't there a great danger of cyclists being run into from behind by a car?

A. No. This is one of the rarest types of bicycling accidents. Most of these happen because one *or more* of the following factors is present: very bad cyclist error (i.e. pulling into a lane without looking), inadequate lighting and reflectorization at night, drunkenness, or very bad motorist error, . It's very rare for a cyclist operating safely and legally to be run into from behind by a motorist.

Q. What about riding at night?

A. Don't let your children ride at night. Wait until they're older and more experienced. Riding at night is statistically ten to twenty times as risky as riding in the daytime. Judging speed and distance, seeing hazards, and assessing traffic situations — things kids aren't nearly as good as adults at anyway — all become much more difficult at night. Younger kids are not developmentally ready for these added challenges. If you or other adult friends ride at night, make sure you have a red rear reflector , wheel and pedal reflectors and a bright, visible headlight. The law requires these things. A taillight, extra reflective tape, and reflective clothing are also good ideas. Be visible, go slower and be more attentive when riding at night. Lack of proper equipment and training contributes to most nighttime accidents. With training and equipment you can easily make night riding far safer and avoid being a statistic.

Q. How should I treat cyclists when I'm driving?

A. If they're behaving illegally and unpredictably, just try to avoid them. If we're behaving legally, just treat us like any other traffic.

Try to leave at least 3 feet clearance when passing us, more if we're kids. Don't try to squeeze past if the lane is really too narrow to do so; slow and follow instead, just as you would for any other slow moving traffic, then pass when it's safe. In narrow lanes like this, knowledgeable cyclists will ride out in the lane to discourage motorists trying to pass or "thread the needle," but less knowledgeable cyclists may try to hug the edge of the road. Don't take that as an invitation to pass them if you don't think there's enough room.

Never turn right from the left side of a bike lane or shoulder where bicyclists are likely to ride. Instead, merge into the bike lane or shoulder before a right turn, just as you would merge into any other lane to the right, so that you won't "cut off" cyclists when you turn. (Well-designed bike lanes will end about 100 feet before a right turn to encourage you to do this.) (Note: Being cut off like this is one of the leading causes of car-bike collisions)

Q. How risky is bicycling?

A. There is always some risk to bicycling, just as there is always some risk to any activity we do. But bicycling is not nearly as risky as many people think. In fact, some studies have shown it to be statistically safer than driving and almost as safe as flying on a commercial airliner. Cyclists with the proper training and experience routinely travel many thousands of miles without incident. Most will never have a serious accident.

Of course, no one can guarantee absolute safety. Good bicycling education programs (such as the League of American Bicyclist's program) teach skills and behaviors that are known to reduce risk. By the end of a class, you and/or your kids should know about and/or have practiced many of those skills and behaviors. It's your job to model these skills for your children, help them practice the skills and use them consistently. The more you practice, the more fun and less risky cycling will be!