

SAN FRANCISCO BICYCLE COALITION'S



FAMILY BIKING GUIDE



A how-to manual for all stages of family biking—from biking while pregnant to biking your child to school.

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The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition is pleased to provide you with this free Family Biking Guide. For too long there has been little to no concrete information about family biking, and we hope that this Family Biking Guide can help you and your loved ones discover and enjoy more quality time together on bike. Happy pedaling!

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BIKING WHILE PREGNANT

Part of a Healthy Pregnancy

You've been enjoying riding your bike, every day or every few months, and now you're pregnant. What now? First, congratulations! Pregnancy is an incredible experience. And biking — the right way — while pregnant can be a great way to deal with many typical pregnancy symptoms, including nausea, foot pain and the growing difficulty of simply getting around. We'll cover each trimester, and what you can expect from biking, below.

YOUR FIRST TRIMESTER

Many women have found that biking is a great way to enjoy your first trimester. It can help you:

- Cope with nausea
- Improve your energy
- Stay fit and keep your weight gain under control
- Continue to feel like you
- Improving your energy

As your body builds the incredibly complex components of your baby, you may find yourself wanting to take a nap shortly after you get up from a twelve hour sleep, or to take a nap before going to bed at night (at 8 PM). Constant naps are usually not practical for most women, nor will you be able to depend on caffeine. One of the best ways to arrive reasonably energized for work in the morning, even when you aren't pregnant, is to ride your bike. Even a slow, leisurely ride — which is always what we recommend — can perk you up just enough that you can make it through your morning. It is also well timed to keep you active during a time of day when you are especially likely to feel nauseated.

STAYING FIT AND KEEPING YOUR WEIGHT GAIN UNDER CONTROL

A healthy pregnancy usually includes gaining weight. You should talk to your doctor to figure out what the right amount of weight gain is for you. Whatever your target range is, keep in mind that staying (or getting) fit will help you and your baby while you're pregnant, during labor and after birth. Being fit doesn't mean looking like a Hollywood trainer or starlet, or doing grueling workouts. But it does mean getting your heart rate up on a regular basis. And yes, it will probably help control your weight gain. It can be very hard to take that



extra weight off after you have given birth. Riding a bike now can make your life easier a year from now, when you're trying to get back in to your normal jeans.

CONTINUING TO FEEL LIKE YOU

Your first trimester is a small taste of the complete transformation of your life that happens when you have a baby. While exciting, these dramatic changes can also be scary. The nausea and fatigue of the first trimester can make it seem like your body is no longer your own. This feeling of displacement may continue as you progress through your pregnancy. Doing things that you have always done, or reconnecting with activities that you love but have put aside, is a great way to ensure that you still feel like you. If you have been biking, keep on biking. Ride with your friends, partner or family to see movies, watch a sunset or go shopping for your first onesie. Be good to yourself.

COPING WITH NAUSEA

As you may have already figured out or may soon learn, "morning sickness" may actually last all day and night. You may even have already gotten to the point where you are desperate to try anything to feel better, from ginger tea to pressure point wristbands. Many women find that one of the best ways — though still imperfect, alas — to cope with nausea is to get up and move. Walking, running, swimming, etc. can all help distract from your nausea, and keep you in shape. Similarly, riding your bike can be a great way to use motion to keep nausea at bay. Of course, you may not have any nausea; enjoy it!

WHAT TO RIDE?

Since you have yet to develop much of a baby bump at this point, you can usually ride the same bike you have always ridden. However, you will likely feel much better and more confident if you are riding in an upright position. Being bent over is less likely to help with nausea and is more tiring than being upright. Keep in mind that during pregnancy your body will be producing and pumping significantly more blood, so being upright can actually help you feel more alert and comfortable. And being comfortable on your bike is important for keeping a steady and relaxed ride.

Also, unless you already have a stable, upright bike that will easily hold a front and/or back child's seat, this is a perfect time to shop for your new Family Bike.

MOM BIKE

Since you have yet to develop much of a baby bump at this point, you can usually ride the same bike you have always ridden. However, you will likely feel much better and more confident if you are riding in an upright position. Being bent over is less likely to help with nausea and is more tiring than being upright. Keep in mind that during pregnancy your body will be producing and pumping significantly more blood, so being upright can actually help you feel more alert and comfortable. And being comfortable on your bike is important for keeping a steady and relaxed ride.

Also, unless you already have a stable, upright bike that will easily hold a front and/or back child's seat, this is a perfect time to shop for your new, or not so new, Family Bike.

Even a slow, leisurely ride — which is always what we recommend — can perk you up just enough that you can make it through your morning.

FAMILY BIKE

During the second and third trimesters, and once you are a mom, you are going to want a completely upright bike that will let you put your feet on the ground when you stop, and that has room for seats for your baby and her diaper bag. Whether you are adapting your current bike, shopping for a



new, used bike, or buying a completely new bike, below are things to look for in your Family Bike. These are qualities that we have found are especially helpful in a bike. But don't panic if your bike is lacking some of these features; you'll still be able to enjoy family biking.

Upright: The more upright, the better. You'll have enough -- whether or not you were pregnant -- back pain later in pregnancy and once you are hauling around your baby. Help your back by investing in a completely upright bike now.

Feet on the Ground: As you get bigger during pregnancy, and then once you're hauling your most precious cargo, you will appreciate the sense of added balance and security that comes with being able to put your feet on the ground without getting off your seat when you are stopped.

Lights: The law requires you to have working front and back lights on your bike -- and for good reason; you will be much safer when people can see you. Look for bikes that come with built-in lights that don't need any special attention. Lights that can be removed, need to be turned off, have separate on switches and/or have short battery lives require extra attention you will likely not want to give once you have a baby.

Fenders: Fenders will keep you and your baby dry, and protect your clothes in the rain and dust.

Baskets/Panniers: You will need and want plenty of carrying capacity for your stuff. Your back will not want the added stress of wearing a bag. There are many great basket and pannier options, including ones that you can remove. Many parents find it easiest to use permanently-installed baskets and/or panniers that you don't remove, because it is one less moving part to worry about. You will likely have a standard diaper bag. You will want to simply drop your diaper bag in to your basket or pannier rather than trying to switch between multiple carrying systems.

Built-In Back Wheel Key Lock: Bending down to lock up a bike with a complicated lock system can be a pain when you're also trying to manage a squirming toddler, inconsolable baby and/or tired back. Save yourself the trouble by looking for bikes with a built-in back wheel key lock. Though in many cities and towns you will need to add additional locks in some locations, back wheel locks are about as time consuming and physically challenging as turning on an oven.

Stable Kickstand: You will need to leave your child in her seat for a bit to open the garage door or lock the bike. It will be easier to do this without worrying about the bike falling if you use a stable kickstand. We recommend the double kickstand, which keeps your bike upright. The double kickstand is especially effective combined with a front wheel that has a deflopilator, which makes the bike even more stable.

Bell: Bells are usually required by law. Besides being useful for alerting people to your presence, they are also fun for your baby to ring ... and ring and ring and ring.

Wide tires: You should not expect to be riding fast when you are pregnant or carrying your child on your bike. Nor will you want to feel all bumps on the street radiating up your tired back. So do yourself a favor and ditch the skinny tires in favor of wider tires that cushion your ride. They'll slow you down, but keep you and your baby more comfortable.

Deflopilator: It's an ugly word, but a wonderful way to make your bike even more stable. This is a little spring that attaches your frame to your front wheel, making it impossible for your front wheel to flop around. It is, hands down, one of the most useful additions to your bike when you're riding with children.

More Gears: Whether you're carrying your child in your womb or on your bike, you will be carrying more weight. If you live in a place that's flat as a pancake, you may be fine with just one gear (unless it also happens to be windy). If you live in a place with any sort of hills, be good to yourself and get some extra gears. Slow and steady is the key to family biking.

Strong brakes: This is not the time to have any doubts about your brakes. Be sure that they are in tip-top shape in all weather and can easily handle big downhills.

Step-Through: If you are struggling to bend over to put on your pants in the morning, it should go without saying that lifting your leg over a bike to mount it will not be easy. So invest in a bike with a step-through frame. Be wary of frames that claim to be step-throughs. If you can't actually step through it without having to bend over, it isn't a step-through.

Internal Hub: This is a technical term for bikes that let you shift gears even when you are stopped. This is hugely helpful so that you don't have any balance issues getting started after a stop because your gear is too difficult.



PARTNER BIKE

Partners who do not get pregnant may need more time to embrace the idea of a Family Bike; you may have really enjoyed riding a sleek, light bike. Give yourself time to adjust. But be aware that it helps to coordinate your bikes if you don't want to have to buy more than one baby seat or if you're considering buying a cargo bike. This advice of course also applies to families with two moms or two dads, or single parents.

The transition to a Family Bike can feel like a big change. Don't worry, though, you don't have to ride your Family Bike all the time. You'll probably have times when you can roll out your pre-baby bikes; it's a great idea for a date night, or if you're headed out on the town by yourself for work or on errands. You'll appreciate your old bike even more!

PARKING

If you have been carrying your bike up and down stairs to park, you may need to find another solution both during pregnancy and after your child is born. Parents who continue to use light bikes or have a magic way of hauling a bike, stuff and a child up and down stairs may not have to change their routines. But parents with heavier bikes, women healing from birth and the fourth trimester or people who don't have eight arms may want to look for other options. Is there room on the ground floor? Can you rent space in a nearby private garage (a common practice – check out Craigslist)? Is your neighborhood conducive to locking your bike outside? Try to make time while you're pregnant to figure this out, because you'll be short on time later on. But it's never too late to find a more convenient parking situation.

YOUR SECOND TRIMESTER

You've made it to your second trimester! For many women, regular nausea is a thing of the past now. You are most likely feeling a lot better and enjoying the glow of pregnancy. However, the second trimester can bring new challenges, from heartburn to swollen feet, to constipation and mood swings. Continuing to bike during your second trimester can be a smart way to continue to stay fit, even out your mood, improve sleep, reduce constipation and take pressure off of your increasingly tired feet and back.

Guaranteed Seat: One of the best things about riding your bike is that you are guaranteed a seat. If you are struggling on crowded trains or buses because you don't yet look pregnant enough for people to offer you a seat (and don't want to demand one), your bike can be a very appealing alternative.

Stability and Balance: As your baby bump grows, you may begin to feel less stable on your feet. This is why we recommend investing in a stable, upright bike in your first trimester — but it's not too late now! The good news is that though it may be more tiring to walk, it's still easy to ride your bike. In fact, as their pregnancy develops, biking will gradually become easier than walking for most women. If you've been biking regularly, you likely will not experience any problems with balance when you are biking because you will be adjusting incrementally. If you have taken a big break from riding, be cautious when you get back on your bike during this trimester since your center of gravity is shifting.

Easy Gears, Shorter Rides: Be good to your body. It can be easy to injure yourself during pregnancy because pregnancy hormones relax your tendons to give you room to grow. As you get bigger, be sure to make more use of your gears to reduce the pressure on your knees. And don't be surprised if your body is simply too tired for longer rides. You will likely still be able to do the short commutes and rides to errands and fun that you have always enjoyed, but you may find yourself getting out less and going less far.

Keep Your Bike on the Ground: Avoid lifting your bike. If you've been hanging your bike on a wall rack at work or home, stop. Ask someone else to lift your bike if you need to put it on a car or bus rack. Arrange your parking at home to avoid having to navigate stairs.

Feeling Vulnerable: Your hormones are raging right now. With that may come an increase in your sense of vulnerability; you will be more sensitive to any harsh words or threatening behavior — everywhere. Not surprisingly then, you'll be even more eager to find comfortable biking routes. Rethink your route so that you are on slower speed streets that feature as much dedicated biking space as possible, or time your rides so that you know that you will be surrounded by many other people on bikes. Ask your partner or a friend to commute with you. If you feel overwhelmed, pull over and take some deep breaths to calm down before continuing.

Overheating: The pregnant body isn't quite as good as the nonpregnant body at managing its temperature, and you might notice a tendency to overheat. Make sure to bring water with you and stay hydrated. Wear layers so that you can strip down if you need to. Be gentle with yourself on San Francisco's rare hot days!

Extra work: During your second and third trimesters, you might notice some shortness of breath even with mild activity. That is because your heart is beating for two! It is normal for your resting heart rate to be 10 to 15 beats/minute faster now than it was before you were pregnant. Many women develop anemia during this period, which can also contribute to a feeling that you have to breath harder to get the air you need. Make sure to take iron if you need it to rebuild your blood stores, and listen to your body. Don't ride so fast or so far that you become exhausted. Remember, the goal is just to stay active and keep doing the things you love to do.

YOUR THIRD TRIMESTER

Biking during your third trimester is very similar to your second trimester, but you'll likely find yourself slowing down even more. Your body will be slowing down and you'll feel less able to get around. Biking allows you to continue to be mobile and stay active. In fact, one of the best things about biking at this point is that it is much easier than walking! And you can still easily stop and find a bathroom. You may notice that your butt is a little more sensitive to sitting on your bike seat for prolonged periods, but that problem usually takes care of itself as you slow down overall and take shorter rides.

The key consideration during your third trimester is figuring out if and when to stop riding your bike. Though many women bike up until the day they go in to labor, many other women eventually find that they are simply too big for their bike to continue riding. If you find yourself hitting your stomach with your knees, you have likely reached the point where you simply don't fit on your bike anymore. You may also find that your balance is off and you don't feel safe riding anymore. If you are still able to easily get on and off your bike, and pedal without constraints or balance issues, then talk to your doctor about whether there is any medical reason why you should stop riding. As your belly gets bigger and your balance changes, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology suggests riding a stationary bike (in addition to swimming and walking) as a safe alternative to riding outdoors, if your focus has primarily been recreational riding. A stationary recumbent can give your belly the room it needs to keep growing. Riding a stationary bike won't help you get to work or appointments, but it might be an easier transition than taking up something totally new at this point. If you do take a break from your bike well before your due date, don't feel disappointed. Enjoy the last days of your pregnancy. You'll be back on your bike in no time.

**Note: As with anything you read on the Internet, our advice does not replace that of your doctor, particularly if you have a high risk of premature labor, a history of chronic illness, or are having a rough pregnancy. Talk to your doctor about your plans and make sure you are both on the same page. It is always up to you to figure out what's best for you.*



BIKING WITH BABIES

Pedaling With Your Baby (Ages 0-3)

GET YOURSELF READY

Recovering From Birth

If you birthed your child, whether you had a rough birth or a movie birth, your body will need time to heal from pregnancy and birthing. Treat yourself well, and don't rush back on to your bike — or anything — until you and your doctor feel like you're ready.



Once you decide that you're ready, spend a day or week or two getting used to riding on your bike by yourself. Your body will be different — maybe a little bit, maybe a lot — from when you were pregnant and even before you got pregnant. Your core muscles will be different, your center of gravity may have shifted, or some other major change to your body will have taken place. Be sure to listen to your body and your doctor. Biking can be a good way to slowly get your body back to your sense of normal. Give yourself time to go on short rides, gradually building up to longer rides as you feel more confident. Of course, it's likely that you won't have the time or energy for more than short jaunts anyway.

Test Your Set Up

As you are getting more comfortable on your bike again, begin to try out rides on your Family Bike. You will want to try out your new set up alone before adding the extra weight and logistics of your baby. A child bike seat will impact the way that you stop and start and mount and dismount. If you've invested in a Family Bike designed specifically for carrying kids or cargo, it will require some minor changes in the way that you handle turns and negotiate tighter spaces. Don't worry; you can do it. But just give yourself a chance to become confident.

Your partners should also practice on the new bike set up before introducing your baby. The addition of a seat or the set up of a family bike can change how you ride.

YOUR SET UP: 0-9 OR 12 MONTHS

Until your baby is able to hold her head up on her own, she should not be carried in a bike seat. But don't worry, Family Bike options are available that will allow you to bike with your baby in the early infant days, toddlerhood and beyond. These

bikes go beyond simply adding a child bike seat to a standard bike frame.

Before Your Child Can Sit Up

If you are biking with a baby under the age of about 9 to 12 months, your baby will need to be in a car seat designed for infants. But how do you do that? The good news is that more and more Family Bikes hit the market every day. These are cargo bikes and trailers that are compatible with car seats; the seat latches in to infrastructure in the box or trailer. Please note that these bikes are only compatible with infant car seats. You will need to move on to a different set up once your baby is too big for his infant car seat.

Product Options

Some parents feel more secure with front carriers because you can see your baby at all times. Front carriers will also allow you to position your baby to face you. Other parents appreciate how easy it is to simply latch a rear trailer to their normal bike. There are also a variety of side carriers and Family Bikes with electric assists. Try out a variety of options (without your baby) while you are expecting or as early as possible to help you select the one that's right for you.

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| • Bullitt | • InSTEP | • The Urban Arrow |
| • Burley | • Madsen | • Trio Bike |
| • CETMA Cargo | • Metrofiets | • WeeRide |
| • Chariot | • Nihola | • WorkCycles |
| • Dutch ID | • Taga | |

Family Bikes tend to be fairly pricey but are often well worth the expense if they function as your first or second mode of transportation. These specialized cargo bikes often come with optional covers that can shield your little ones from the elements. It will allow you to ride in the rain, snow or extremely sunny weather. Some trailers also work as strollers.

After Your Child Can Sit Up

Once your child can sit well, generally after 9 to 12 months, your baby may be ready to ride in the Family Bike in a seated position (there is usually a seating ledge with harnesses for multiple riders). Younger riders will need props under their feet because their feet will not reach the bottom of the bike. WorkCycles carries toddler support seats for its front Family Bikes. Your diaper bag will usually do the trick; though position it to keep temptations like milk bottles out of sight unless you want to deal with endless requests.

Family Bikes can also accommodate more than one child. In many Family Bikes, there is room for both a baby in a car seat and an older child sitting in the box, or on the back of the bike. These Family Bikes make it feasible to haul your baby, your groceries, dog or other large object in style.

Legal Considerations

There is one legal complication you should know about when using a Family Bike with an infant. Though it is not good for your baby's neck to wear a helmet while riding in a car seat in your Family Bike because the combination puts your baby's delicate neck in an odd position, California and many other states' law technically requires anyone under the age of 18 to wear a helmet, even in a Family Bike. This law was clearly written with children able to sit up in a seat in mind. But it is the law. According to Dr. Coffa, "Without clear scientific data about what is safest, it is difficult to make a medical recommendation about car seats without helmets." It is up to you to decide what is best for your baby.

Accessories

Your set-up should be pretty similar to when you take a stroller ride. Secure your baby's binky, keep a blanket or special lovey or toy handy, keep some extra layers ready in case the weather changes and don't be surprised if your baby naps! Many kiddos, like their parents, find bikes relaxing. In fact, that can be a great opportunity for you to pull over and enjoy much-needed down time.



YOUR SET UP: 9 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS

When your baby is able to sit up without falling, hold her head up on her own, and can fit in to a helmet, she will likely be ready to ride in a front or rear bike seat. Front-mounted seats typically have lower weight limits so that you can start biking earlier, and rear-mounted seats typically have higher weight limits, which means you can use them for longer. You should choose whatever feels most comfortable for you and your family.

This is the most common age that parents start biking with their babies if they haven't invested in a Family Bike designed for use with young infants.

YOUR FIRST RIDE

Overcoming Fears

For many parents, the first ride on your bike with your baby can be both terrifying and exhilarating. Your maternal hormones can go in to overdrive making you worried about your baby's safety. While it's simultaneously wonderful to be back in the saddle, reconnecting with your old self, you may feel fearful, not unlike the first time you tried other new things with your baby. This is perfectly normal. To help you through your fear, try riding for the first time on a car-free greenway or protected, not too crowded space with smooth pavement. Sunday Streets, the Embarcadero, JFK Drive in Golden Gate Park on Sundays and Crissy Field are all excellent places for your first ride.

Have your partner or friend ride behind you. Keep your ride short and be prepared to take frequent breaks to feed your baby. If you start to feel worried or unsafe, pull over, take some deep breaths and let cooler heads prevail before heading off again. Many parents have found that they are least scared when actually riding, because it's literally getting back in a bike seat, and are most concerned when they are at home, thinking about taking a ride (much as you might find yourself worrying about all kinds of potential harms to your baby). Most importantly, relax and focus on the fun times you'd like to have biking with your baby!

That said, even if you were very confident on a bike before you had your child, you are likely to find that you will see danger where you never did before and have entirely new concerns about street safety or routes. This is natural and quite similar to many Moms' first experiences driving and walking with their new baby. Though you may quickly feel comfortable riding on a protected greenway, it may take more time to regain your confidence on city streets. Again, this is totally normal.

Choose your routes carefully, sticking to low-speed streets, flatter routes, and our city's growing network of protected bikeways. Have your partner or friend ride with you. If you are planning to bike your baby to daycare, experiment with a few routes ahead of time to find one that feels safest to you, ride with a partner or other parents and take it slow. Many parents find that their rides are filled with more smiles and waves from other people, including people in cars, than scary moments. People love a baby on a bike. In fact, you may find yourself delayed at intersections because someone rolled down their window to coo at your little one.

What to Expect From Your Child

Depending on your baby's temperament, she may take some time getting used to biking. Expect a certain amount of crying or other kinds of protest while she adjusts to a new experience. It can help to talk or sing to reassure her that you are there; particularly if she is still young enough that he doesn't yet have full vision. It can also help to refrain from putting on the helmet until just before you start riding. For some kids, the helmet is the toughest part and once they get moving, they are happy as clams. Hopefully you'll find that your baby loves being in motion on the bike — just like you!



Losing Weight

Finally, anyone who begins riding a baby or child around, particularly on a Family Bike, should not be surprised to find that you lose weight. Even if you've been riding regularly before, the added work of hauling around your baby can often translate in to a slimmer body, or at least a bigger appetite.

BIKING WITH TODDLERS

Pedaling With Your Child (Ages 3-5)

If you're using a front bike seat, this will be a time to change things up. When your toddler reaches the weight limit on your front seat, you will need to move her to a back seat, Family Bike, tag-along, or tandem.

LONG BIKES, TAG-ALONGS AND TANDEM

As your child gets closer to five years old, she may be ready for a tag-along, tandem or a "long bike" with child handlebars. Don't rush in to this. Your child will need to be able to stay awake for the whole ride, be able to sit safely on a bike without restraints, and to resist the urge to do something dangerous, like lean waaaay over. It is a good idea to keep these initial rides short so that you can build up your child's skills. The more comfortable your child is on her own bike, and understands the rules of the road, the better these tag-along and tandem options will work for all of you.

Product Options

If you think your child is ready, here are some products to investigate:

- Adams
- Brown Cycles
- FollowMe Tandem
- OnderWater
- Surly
- Trail-Gator
- Trail-a-bike
- Xtracycle
- Yuba

RIDING WITH TWO (OR MORE)

So you've been around the block with your first, but now you have a toddler and a newborn. Of course, if your partner is along for all rides, then this is the time when you need a second bike seat, or you can move your older child to a tag along or tandem if she's old enough and ready.

Another option is to outfit your bike with front- and rear-mounted seats and ride with both kids. If you want to ride with two kids, the bike becomes a necessity for ease, comfort, and safety. By now you realize that all things pass, and soon enough your oldest will be riding a bike on her own, but for now a Family Bike is often a necessity, especially for longer rides.



YOUR CHILD'S FIRST BIKE

Toddlers around two years old are usually big enough to begin biking on their own with a balance bike. Balance bikes are small bikes without pedals. Some also have a more limited turning radius than regular bikes so the handlebars can't flip or turn unexpectedly. Though you may have learned to ride on a bike with training wheels, or a tricycle, try a balance bike; pedaling is often the easy part of learning to ride. As the name suggests, the bike teaches children to balance, builds confidence about their biking abilities and helps them move toward a full bike that they can pedal themselves much sooner. You can also remove the pedals (and cranks as well) from a smaller bike to make your own balance bike.

Children who are well versed on a balance bike often spend less time with training wheels or skip them altogether because they've already learned the toughest part of biking — balancing. Here in San Francisco, we often strongly suggest enrolling in the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's Freedom from Training Wheels workshops, which teach children how to bike, with your assistance.

Product Options

- Kazam
- Skuut
- Strider
- WeeRide

BIKING TO SCHOOL

Pedaling to Daycare and Elementary School



KIDS ON YOUR BIKE

You are probably reading this section if you have already found yourself enjoying biking more casually with your family — or perhaps you're just panicked about how you'll ever manage to get everyone to school and work in time every day without spending hours or huge amounts of money. Making the shift from casual riding to commuting can seem really big and mysterious, akin to your child's first tooth coming in. But it's actually fairly straightforward. Biking to school is an excellent way to get to school and work quickly, while spending quality time with your children. There are two keys for success: practice and routine.

Find a Route

You can spend a lot of time puzzling out the best route to take to school and then work. Some routes are very different during rush hour than Sunday. So use your bike commute time before your child starts school to explore a few routes. Be sure to explore both there and back, finding the flattest and calmest route home. Also, check out the bike parking situation at the school ahead of time. You will want to know what to expect. It might take a little extra time out of your busy schedule, but you'll feel more confident on your first day. Plan to have both parents (or some other support person) do the school ride together on the first day — on the way home too is also nice. If you are riding with a child on your bike and more than one person will be responsible for transport, both of you will need a seat on your bike, or you will need to exchange it between bikes, or exchange bikes at

some point during the day. Keep your child's helmet with the bike seat or leave one at school. That's the last thing you want to forget!

As with most commuting, the streets are nicer when you travel on the earlier side. Heading out early also means that you won't be tempted to bike more aggressively than you want for the sake of time. On the way home, though, you may want to commute during peak rush hour because you will be surrounded by lots of other people commuting on bikes, making you feel safer.

Build a Routine

Once you figure out your optimal route and timing, make it a religion. Build your morning routine around being able to commute at that particular time. You and your child will probably appreciate the predictability. Because bike commuting to school is usually so quick and fun, you may find yourself even choosing to bike in the rain, with your child protected, even if you usually don't bike in the rain. Kids love having a routine!

Great Quality Time

Keep in mind that your child is taking it all in during your rides. Encourage her language development and use the opportunity to point out trees or trucks or whatever tickles her fancy along the way, learning and reinforcing new sounds and words. Unfortunately, you probably won't get much of an answer to "what did you do in school today?" at this age. But, there are other fun things at this age: pressing buttons! Crossing buttons or special bike light buttons make noise when pressed, so they're a big draw for tiny fingers interested in cause and effect. And finally, learning colors through observing traffic light signals. Favorite games like "I spy" takes on new depth and fun as you ride past things.

Teach Street Safety Skills

This is also a great time to talk about street safety. Consistently saying things like, "I'm stopping because the light is red. Now we're going because the light is green and there are no cars coming." Ask your children to say when it's safe to go, and generally explain the rules of the street to them. In addition, point out the "edges" of the sidewalk or street. Edges are the places they will learn to stop and decide later if and when a street is safe to cross. This will make your job easier later on when you're teaching them about walking and biking independently, and give them greater confidence too. Biking kids often know the rules of the road better than many adults — even their parents.

Combining Walking & Biking

If you have the good fortune to live within walking distance of your child's school, but you plan to bike to work, you don't have to leave your bike at home. In many cities, you'll see parents rushing down a street pushing a stroller in one hand and a bike in another, or carrying a child in a pack while rolling a bike.

For older kids, they'll sometimes enjoy sitting on the bar or in a seat while you walk the bike home together. Or even better for tired parents, the child pushing the bike for you! Having a bike speeds up the walk home while allowing you to still benefit from relaxed quality time with your child. If you're picking up groceries on the way home, it's great to be able to just put them on the bike and walk them home than having everyone grouse about carrying a bag in addition to school and work bags.

Biking to school is an excellent way to get to school and work quickly, while spending quality time with your children.

KIDS RIDING INDEPENDENTLY

Practice Makes Perfect

Assuming that you've already taught your child to bike safely, before you begin the weekday school run, practice it at least twice with your child on a Sunday morning (when traffic is usually lighter). If you're finding that it's simply not working to have her on the street with you, try having her ride on the sidewalk. In many cities, like San Francisco, children 12 years or under can legally bike on the sidewalk during daylight. But keep in mind that you could ride in the same direction as vehicle traffic, and should always yield to pedestrians. Note: Business districts actually don't allow anyone to bike on the sidewalk.

Safe Routes to School

Finally, the San Francisco Bike Coalition is part of an initiative to help more kids and families safely bike and walk to school, called Safe Routes to School. The walking and biking trainings encourage regular parent chaperoned "bike train" groups to and from school. Contact the Bicycle Coalition to learn about starting a Safe Routes program or parts of it at your school.

SF Bike to School Events

Don't forget to sign up for the next Bike to School Event, an annual citywide celebration and a great excuse for thousands of families to try biking to school. If you're not already biking to school, it's a great reason to give it a try. If you are, it's also a great opportunity to encourage other parents at your child's school to get in the family saddle.



TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO BIKE

How to Help Your Kid Pedaling

Many families are quite comfortable commuting with their child while he or she is still riding on a parent's bike, but become worried by the idea of their child doing the same route on an independent bike. You may worry that your child doesn't have the judgment or physical skills to negotiate the street. It's a perfectly understandable and ordinary concern. In fact, you probably worried about your child crossing the street by herself too (and always will).

Teaching your child to bike safely to school — every day — requires the same approach: lots and lots of practice and consistent drilling of fundamentals. But it's absolutely worth the effort. Biking to school develops your child's confidence and sense of independence, and builds exercise in to her day — without her realizing that it's anything but fun. That said, you can always postpone your child's launch date by using tag-alongs or a Family Bike for as long as she'll let you.

FREEDOM FROM TRAINING WHEELS

Eventually, though, the very exciting day will come when your child wants to bike on her own. You may want to borrow a balance bike from a friend, or test them out at the bike store to see what works best for your child. With or without a bike, you can enroll her in one of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's Freedom from Training Wheels Workshops. She'll learn how to get rolling on her own and some basic skills. Then start taking her out for practice. Start in car-free spaces like Sunday Streets or Crissy Field. Look for flat quiet areas in your neighborhood such as wide quiet sidewalks, blacktop at your local school, or even basketball or tennis courts that are not in use to practice biking. When practicing on streets, find very quiet ones or look for ones that have wide and open sidewalks for your child to get the feel of riding with street rules.

If you can't attend one of the Freedom from Training Wheels workshops, you can still use our Parent Tip Sheet to help your child learn to ride on two wheels!



GETTING STREET READY

The graduation from simply being able to ride with ease (braking, turning, navigating hills) and being confident with street rules takes a lot of practice and diligence. When practicing on quiet streets or sidewalks, walk along side with your child and talk about street rules. Emphasize the importance of safety and “police” rules.

Skills to Teach

The big concepts to make sure everyone is confident about are:

- 1 Street and traffic safety, especially around crossings and driveways, where most crashes occur.
- 2 Understanding and identifying “edges” of the street, to help them figure out where to stop.
- 3 Riding predictably in a straight line down the street and outside the door zone.
- 4 Riding on uneven and varied surfaces.
- 5 Dealing with curbs.
- 6 Getting used to hills (uphill and downhill).
- 7 Generally getting a sense of stamina.

If your child has been riding a balance bike throughout toddlerhood, chances are that these are areas she's already mastered.



Keep It Short

When you all are feeling ready, try longer rides through Golden Gate Park or just go to your neighborhood park or playground. If your child has the attention span and interest, check the Chain of Events and join one of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's relaxed theme rides, from the ice cream ride (very popular) to history tours. But don't push it. Always keep options open to cut a ride short, either by keeping the route relatively close to home or keeping public transit options that allow bikes in mind.

It's much better to leave your child wanting more at the end of the ride than pushing her too far. A few other tips: Don't overload your child with information. Pick one or two things to reinforce each ride and give enough practice time and silent time while riding for your young person to integrate the new skill.



Front or Back?

If you're riding bikes together, don't worry about whether to ride in front or back. There's no right or wrong way. Ride in front to control the pace and where you stop. Ride in back to keep a close eye on your child and encourage good and safe biking behavior. If you and your partner are both riding with your child, you may feel safest with them in the middle of the "sandwich" with either adult in the front and the back. And as always, remember that your child is taking cues from you at all times on how to ride (and do everything else), so make sure that you're modeling the behavior that you want her to learn.



BIKE GEAR FOR KIDS

How to Choose the Best Seats and Helmets for Your Child

FRONT-MOUNTED SEATS

Many people choose a front bike seat mounted on the handlebar stem because they can keep an eye on their baby. This set-up allows for chats, pointing out interesting objects and ensuring that your baby is safe and secure. She'll appreciate the comfort of being almost in your arms.

Product Options

There are a variety of front baby seats. We highly recommend using these seats on fully upright bikes. They will feel much safer, particularly on any downhills. Here are some brands:

- BoBike
- iBert
- Bike Tutor
- Copilot
- Co-Rider
- Kettler
- Taga
- WeeRide
- Yepp

Accessories

When you are choosing a seat, consider whether you want something that can be easily removed from your bike to share with your partner or simply free you up; some brands are better for this than others. Many seats come with a variety of add-on options, including nap bars and windshields. The seat will not be a very comfortable place for a nap without the nap bar, so if you intend to bike during nap time, this may be a good investment. Windshields can be helpful during windy, rainy or otherwise bad weather. Some parents find that they also like having a special handlebar just for their baby or toddler. This can dissuade your child from pulling on cables, ringing your bell constantly or getting possessive of your gears or brakes. As toddlers get more experienced with their seat, they may be able to ride with their stuffed animals or blankets without throwing or dropping them overboard. At some point, though, you will probably want to move your child in to a rear seat. You will definitely know that it's time when he starts changing your gears and/or operating your brakes.

REAR-MOUNTED SEATS

There are many options for rear-mounted bike seats. These bike seats are mounted on a very sturdy rear rack with secure latching systems. As with some front seats, you can install racks on multiple bikes in order to easily move the bike seat from one bike to another. Most rear-mounted bike seats come with excellent safety features such as three- or six-point harness seatbelts for your child, bumper guards, and protective seat backs and sides for your baby. It is also



possible to purchase rear mounting seats with recline features that allow your child to nap comfortably.

Rear-mounted seats can be comfortably used on most types of bikes. If you choose the rear-mounted bike seat, you may want to install mirrors on the ends of your handlebars to allow you to see your child easily while riding.

Rear-mounted bike seats provide nearly the same intimacy as front-mounted seats, allowing you to have those same great conversations and moments that you might have enjoyed with your child in a front-mounted seat. If you start with a front seat and move to a back seat when your child is older, celebrate! Your little one will feel proud about being becoming a big boy or girl.

Here are some brands:

- Bellelli
- Beto
- BoBike
- CoPilot
- Cyclepro
- Kettler
- Sunlite
- Taga
- Topeak
- Xtracycle
- Yepp
- Yuba

Regardless of which bike seat you choose, you're likely to get lots of smiles and waves, particularly if your baby or toddler likes to wave too. People will go out of their way to say hi. Families on bikes make people smile.

EXTRA TIPS

Installation: Unless you are extremely confident in your mechanical skills, take your seat to a bike shop to have it professionally installed.

Practice: Be sure to ride your bike with the seat on your own — no baby — for a bit to get used to the different way it rides. Consider carrying a sack of flour or a large bag of rice to simulate the weight of your child. The center of gravity with a child in the seat will shift and can be different from solo rides.

You will likely find that you have to dismount your seat differently; it can take some getting used to.

Accessories: Your set up should make it as easy as possible for you to lock up, get bags and store bags and otherwise arrange yourself. Check out our advice on an ideal your family bike for specific tips.

Decoding the Brands: You will notice that some seats, including infant seats, have “city versions” and regular versions. This can be very confusing. The main difference tends to be whether the seat has built-in leg protection from your wheel for your child. The manufacturer is assuming that your bike may not have a skirt cover on your wheel. If your wheel is au natural, then you will need the built-in leg protection. If you have a skirt/trouser cover, then you will not need it.

HELMETS

In California, and most states, all children under the age of 18 are required to wear a helmet. The best way to get them to agree to and enjoy wearing a helmet is to model the behavior for them. Helmets beget helmets. Put your helmet on first and make a big, happy show about it. Let your baby or toddler touch your helmet. Then make a big, fun event out of pulling out your child’s helmet and putting it on her. Use a special helmet song for these times or get excited about everyone being in “helmet club” together. Tell them they “get” to wear a helmet when they ride and pick out special stickers to put on their helmet.

Product Options

Some helmet brands are better designed to avoid pinching your child’s chin, while still keeping the fit snug. Try a few before you buy. There are a few helmet brands that cater to the very small:

- Bell
- Lazer
- Nutcase
- Giro
- Bern



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Still have questions about family biking? We offer a variety of classes and other resources to help you and your family discover the joys of biking together.

FAMILY BIKING CLASSES

We are proud to offer on-the-road and in-class family biking classes. This four-part series covers everything from riding while pregnant to biking to school with your child. Sign up at sfbike.org/family

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The SF Bicycle Coalition is proud to be a founding member of the San Francisco Safe Routes to School Program which helps make biking and walking to school easier for parents and kids. sfbike.org/saferoutes

READ ABOUT OTHER FAMILIES WHO BIKE

Read profiles of just a few of the families already biking and learn about their experiences, tips, and why they choose to bike as a family. Keep an eye out -- you may recognize some of these neighbors from the bike lane. Get inspired reading profiles of these San Franciscan families.

FREEDOM FROM TRAINING WHEELS

The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition is proud to help the next generation learn to ride confidently and comfortably on two wheels at the Freedom From Training Wheels Family Workshops across the city at events like Sunday Streets and Family Day. sfbike.org/freedom

The Family Biking Guide was written by SF Bicycle Coalition Deputy Director and mother of two, Kit Hodge. Huge thanks to the team of local biking parents who provided their thoughtful edits: SF Bicycle Coalition Board President, Lainie Motamedi; Safe Routes to School Manager, Jason Serafino-Agar; Dylan and Susan Riley. Special thanks to Dr. Diana Coffa, MD, Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine at UCSF, for thoroughly reviewing this guide for its scientific integrity.



This free Family Biking Guide is brought to you by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, a member-based nonprofit promoting the bicycle for everyday transportation. To learn more about the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition and our family biking work, visit sfbike.org/family.