



To the Editor:

This is an article from Janet O'Connell, Executive Director of the Bicycle Trade Association of Canada (BTAC). It is available for publishing at no charge, provided Ms. O'Connell is cited as the author. She may be reached at 905-853-5031.

Ticket to Ride

Help your child get the most out of this biking season

Bike riding is an iconic childhood activity. We associate it with youth, freedom and the first giddy thrill of independence.

With spring just around the corner, kids will soon be clamoring for new wheels. Not even the most careful parent can prevent a few skinned knees. But there are things you can do to make your child's biking experience as safe as possible.

First, buy the right bike. Your child should be able to put both feet on the ground while straddling the top tube, and stand on their toes while seated. That's how you know the bike fits. A machine that's too large will be difficult to control, so don't purchase something for your child to 'grow into.'

Visit your local bicycle shop for help. A specialty bike retailer can direct you to quality products, and back them up with capable, professional service. You'll support the local economy, encourage physical activity and reduce pollution, all at the same time.

Second, wear a helmet. This sounds obvious, but a properly fitted helmet can reduce the risk of brain injury in a fall or collision by a whopping 88%. The straps should remain as adjusted for the entire ride, and the casket should sit level on the head.

Third, treat driveways as intersections. Teach your children to: a) stop before entering the road, b) look left, ahead, right, then left again, and c) proceed when the road is clear.

Fourth, remember that sidewalks aren't always safe. Drivers, pedestrians and pets are all potential sidewalk hazards. Sidewalks can also be uneven, making it hard to steer. The sidewalk may be the safest place for very young children, but more experienced cyclists should ride on the street, where drivers can see them.

Fifth, know the rules of the road. They apply to all vehicles, including bikes. Stop at stop signs and red lights, and always ride on the right hand side of the road.

Of course, technique is only part of cycling. Children also need to understand how traffic works in order to make safe choices. This takes time and experience, so kids under nine years old should be supervised while biking.

I suggest that parents start with the Canadian Cycling Association's (CCA) CAN-BIKE cycling safety program. You can find details at www.canadiancycling.com.

More information on bike safety can also be found at BTAC's website: www.btac.org.

Teach your child the basics of safe biking now, and they'll be enjoying themselves for years to come. Happy cycling!