



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Kids need guidance on how to ride bikes safely

By Jane Sutter

For many kids, knowing how to ride a bicycle gives them a sense of freedom and maturity, with the opportunity to ride to a friend's house, a playground, a park or just tool around the neighborhood to see what's going on.

Parents, on the other hand, might feel a sense of trepidation, knowing how vulnerable a child or teen is when riding a bike on city or suburban streets.

That's why it's so important that kids learn how to ride a bike safely and obey the rules of the road, according to Joe Mushock, who has been the bicycle and pedestrian safety coordinator for Cayuga County for 21 years.

Mushock also taught elementary and junior high school for 33 years. Now he spends his time working with schools and other groups teaching kids how to be responsible cyclists.

Helmets are vital

The No. 1 mistake that Mushock says kids make when riding a bike is not wearing a helmet. New York State requires all bicyclists under the age of 14 years old to wear safe-



ty-certified helmets when they are operators or passengers on a bicycle. (Children under age 1 are prohibited from being transported on a bicycle.)

As part of his job, Mushock helps fit helmets on kids. A correct-fitting helmet is essential for protecting the child's head, he said. Most helmets for kids now come with adjustment dials,

he said, so as the child's head grows larger, the helmet can be adjusted. "If a kid isn't comfortable (with the way the helmet fits), and it's aggravating to put it on and wear it, then the kid won't wear it."

The helmet should cover the child's forehead, Mushock said, and the strap should fit tightly enough under the child's chin, so the helmet doesn't flop.

As for clothing, light-colored or reflective clothing is best, Mushock said. He's invested in rolls of colorful reflective tape, which he gives out in strips for kids to put on their bikes and helmets. If children are riding at dusk or dawn, Mushock recommends a light for both the front and back of the bike, because a reflector may not be seen in the limited light. (New York State law requires a front light and back reflector.)

Another accessory that Mushock is a fan of is a bell on the bike, which came to his attention as he watched the PBS TV show *Call the Midwife*. The midwives ride their bikes to house calls and ring their bike's bells to alert pedestrians when they are approaching them

BIKING TIPS FOR KIDS *Continued on page 2*

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration encourages kids to view their bikes as vehicles, not toys, and drive their bicycle and follow these tips. More information and videos are available at [Bicycle Safety: Bike Safety Tips for Kids and Adults | NHTSA](#). A complete PDF with these tips and more is available at [8024a_youthtips.pdf](#)

Kids should remember to:

Wear a bike helmet. Protect your brain. Never buy a helmet to "grow into." Learn about the two-finger rule for fitting a helmet with this downloadable pdf. [Bicycle Safety: Fitting a Bicycle Helmet](#)

Adjust your bike to fit. Stand over your bike. There should be 1 to 2 inches between the rider and the top tube (bar) if using a road bike and 3 to 4 inches if using a mountain bicycle. The seat should be level from front to back, and the height should be adjusted to allow a slight bend at the knee when the leg is fully extended. The handlebar height should be at the same level as the seat.

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from behind. That got him thinking, “These bikes should have bells.”

In fact, New York State now requires bicycles have a bell, horn or other device that can be heard from 100 feet away. For children, a bell is probably best because they won’t have to move their hand off the handlebar to ring it, where a horn requires a strong squeeze from the hand.

Bells also come in handy when bicyclists are on a trail and coming up behind a walker, and that’s especially important if someone is riding an electric bike, Mushock noted. “They’re so quiet” and pedestrians don’t hear riders coming up behind them. “They should be ringing their bell and letting people know and (they’re) not doing it.”

Following rules of the road

Many parents have safety concerns about their children riding their bikes on streets and prefer to take them to bike paths in parks, etc., Mushock said. Consequently, a lot of children aren’t taught how to ride safely on streets. A key mistake that Mushock says he sees youth riders make is that they don’t ride on the right side, with traffic.

Instead, they’ll ride toward the traffic, which can be very disconcerting to a driver of a car. “When you just see them coming at you, it surprises you.” A cyclist riding facing traffic doesn’t realize the fast speed at which he is coming toward cars, and he won’t realize that if he is coming over a hill or a knoll, he can’t see the cars coming toward him and drivers can’t see him.

New York State law requires that bicyclists ride with traffic. According to the state Department of Transportation website, bicycling against traffic is a leading cause of bicycle

BIKING AND NEW YORK STATE LAW:

A bicycle must be equipped with:

- A brake that is capable of making the bike tires skid on dry, level pavement.
- A bell, horn or other device that can be heard at least 100 feet away. Sirens and whistles are not permitted.
- A headlight and taillight. A bicycle ridden between a half-hour after sunset and a half-hour before sunrise must be equipped with a white front headlight visible in darkness for at least 500 feet and a red taillight visible for at least 300 feet. One of these lights must also be visible on each side for at least 200 feet.
- Reflectors on the wheels. A bicycle, when purchased new and/or ridden at night, must have reflective tires or wide-angle, spoke-mounted reflectors. Reflectors must be colorless or amber for front wheels and colorless or red for rear wheels.
- In New York State, all bicyclists under the age of 14 years old are required to wear safety certified bicycle helmets when they are operators or passengers on bicycles. Children aged 1 to 4 must wear certified bicycle helmets and ride in specially designed child safety seats. Children under 1 are prohibited from being transported on a bicycle. Any parent or guardian who permits his or her child to violate the helmet law is subject to a fine of up to \$50.

The NYS Department of Transportation has a comprehensive website about bicycling, including interactive maps of bike routes, at [Bicycle Home](#). Especially helpful is the FAQ at [FAQs](#)

crashes. Riding with traffic makes bicyclists more visible and their movements more predictable to motorists.

While New York State law does not prohibit the riding of bicycles on sidewalks, it recommends against it except for young children, according to the DOT website. The website states: “Sidewalks are for pedestrians. Cyclists on sidewalks can cause conflicts with pedestrians; like wrong-way riding, crashes can occur because bicyclists are in situations where others do not expect them. Except for very young cyclists under parental supervision, sidewalks are

not for bicycling.” Some municipalities may prohibit cycling on sidewalks and so cyclists should check first.

Traffic gardens

A great way for youngsters, even preschoolers, to learn how to ride bicycles and tricycles safely is with a layout called a traffic garden, Mushock said. Basically, a traffic garden is a scaled-down street network where kids can practice riding their bikes (learning how to balance) and learn the rules of how to ride, without worrying about cars.

In his role with Cayuga County, Mushock worked with Playspace in Auburn, a non-profit, to install a traffic garden, and he also worked with the preschool program at Auburn High School to create one there. His next project is to install a traffic garden at Casey Park in Auburn on the site of a former skateboard park.

Mushock is also a big advocate of parents allowing their children to ride their bikes to school, and he currently works with nine schools in Cayuga County on “ride your bike to school” programs. He also has put on many “bike rodeos” where kids learn safety lessons, improve their cycling skills, have their bikes checked, and so on.

Parents can check with their town and county governments to learn what services and programs these municipalities offer related to bike safety.

BIKING TIPS FOR KIDS *Continued from page 1*

Check your equipment. Inflate tires and check that brakes work.

See and be seen. Wear neon, fluorescent or bright colors along with things that reflect light, such as reflective tape or flashing lights to make yourself more visible to others.

Control your bike. Ride with two hands on the handlebars unless signaling a turn. Place books and other items in a bike carrier or backpack.

Watch for and avoid road hazards. Look for hazards that may make you crash, such as potholes, broken glass, gravel, puddles, leaves and dogs. If riding in a group, the rider in front should yell and point to hazards to alert others.

TRAFFIC GARDENS:

For more information on traffic gardens and to download helpful resources (including how to create your own traffic garden), go to: [About Traffic Gardens](#) | [Traffic-Gardens.com](#)

Jane Sutter is a freelance writer based in Rochester.

Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**



Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

Withdraws from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos

... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:
Tammy Sylvester,
Diocesan Coordinator
of Safe Environment Education
and Compliance,
585-328-3228,
or Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimsassistance@dor.org.

All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>
A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.common sense media.org/parent-concerns>
A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
www.BivonaCAC.org
585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8449
www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795
www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
www.cacfingerlakes.org
315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization:
www.d2l.org

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org
716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:
585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6