

Teach your children to ride safely

By Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News

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Cycling with your kids is a great way to teach them about the rules of the road. Many kids these days don't know any better than that the only way to get around is by being driven around in the family car.

There are some invaluable lessons to be learned and wonderful experiences to be gained for kids by cycling to go somewhere, whether it's to school, a ride through the neighbourhood or to the store, or a fun ride on the dike trails.

There are also some things to consider when taking your kids on a bike ride through town.

Due to their age and lack of experience, kids will need constant supervision when riding in traffic. They have no understanding of the complexity of traffic and the potential dangers, which will have to develop over time. The goal is to instill respect, without instilling fear.

They haven't yet developed the ability to judge speed and distance, and will need some coaching when deciding whether or not a gap in traffic will give them sufficient time to cross a road.

Kids have more limited peripheral vision than adults, and tend to need more time to focus on an object. Being closer to the ground than you are, they may not see everything that you see, not being able to look over shrubs, parked cars or other objects. They also may not be seen as easily by other road users. Wearing bright clothing and reflectors on the bike will help.

You can also use the time you spend driving your kids around in the car by teaching them about traffic to make them more aware of what's happening on the road. Remember that they learn from the way you drive. Are you an aggressive driver? Do you stop for stop signs? Do you obey the speed limits? You may not have to worry that your child will exceed the speed limit of 50 km/h on his bike, but some day he

will probably drive a car, and your lessons will likely influence his driving style.

Maple Ridge allows cycling on the sidewalk (not Pitt Meadows). This is sometimes unavoidable if you need to be on roads with busy traffic and higher speeds, such as Lougheed Highway and Dewdney Trunk Road.

It's important to be aware of the potential dangers of riding on the sidewalk. My 19-year-old daughter learned that lesson the other day, when she was dropped off with her bike at home by an apologetic driver, fortunately unharmed. But her front wheel ended up underneath the truck and was quite crumpled. The driver was at fault. He hadn't looked her way, and incorrectly assumed that another car had stopped to let him through, while that car had actually stopped to let her cross.

Drivers may not watch for cyclists or pedestrians when turning into or out of driveways or side streets, especially when cyclists are riding against traffic on the sidewalk. I asked my daughter, "Did you make eye contact with the driver?"

She replied: "No, but I had stopped at the curb for about 30 seconds, and I thought he saw me ..."

Before crossing a driveway or side street, teach your kids to always make eye contact with the driver of a car that's just about to turn to make sure that he sees you.

And if you need to ride on the sidewalk, it's best to be on the right side of the road as opposed to riding against traffic.

Kids also need to learn to understand that they need to share the sidewalk with others, including elderly people, who are not quick to react and more easily startled. This means they need to slow down and give others plenty of space, and if they're approaching someone from behind, use a bell.

Before they turn into smart teenagers and start declining bits of advice from their dumb parents, make sure to teach them the importance of being able to hear when cycling, which means: no headsets.

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