



4 Tips for Getting Your Kids to School on Bikes



Class is officially in session across Sonoma County, and while you're still settling into a routine consider fine-tuning your morning commute or incorporating cycling into your family's day.

Getting the kids off to school on their bikes can be a fun family activity whether you're joining them or preparing them to make the best decisions on their ride.

For many, the commute to school is short and relatively simple, but it's still a good idea to plan and stay prepared.

In Sonoma County, there are programs to help families make the best out of their rides to school. [Sonoma County Safe Routes to School](#) helps make walking and biking to class more accessible for students across the city with the goal of reducing single family vehicle trips and improving student and environmental health.

Participate in their September "Buddy Meet Up Challenge", International Walk & Roll to School Day in October, or Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in November to champion walking or bicycling to and from class. In the meantime, prepare for back-to-school rides with these important tips outlined below.

1. Teach important safety lessons

Teachable moments aren't just for the classroom. Take some time before hitting the road to teach (or remind) the whole family about bicycle safety. When riding, remember to:

- Travel with the flow of traffic. It's the law in California and helps drivers to see you and have more time to react.

- Pay attention to parked cars. Doorings can be some of the most dangerous occurrences for cyclists. Keep kids in bike lanes when available and scan parallel parked cars for exiting drivers or passengers to help prevent any dangerous crashes.
- Put headphones away. Try to eliminate any distractions that you can.

Many safety classes are available around the North Bay and Bay Area for families that cycle together. These can help prepare you for the road and give you the confidence to make every ride to and from school your best.

2. Grab the right gear

Even a short commute to school requires some forethought. First, make sure the whole family has well-fitting helmets. It's law in California for children under 18 to wear a helmet if they are riding a bicycle or are riding in a bicycle attachment, like a trailer. Unlike some states, California does not offer any exemptions. So, regardless of where you're riding, religious beliefs, or other factors, make sure you're prepared.

The law states that the helmet should be, "approved, properly fitted and fastened." Before taking off on your first rides of the season, make sure those helmets fit snug – but not too tight. If you're unsure if a helmet is right for your child (or you), a bicycle shop may be a helpful resource. Children not wearing a helmet could result in a traffic citation and become an issue when negotiating with an insurance company if a crash were to happen.

Reflective or brightly colored clothing are also ideal for school commutes. This helps drivers notice and identify cyclists. While you may be riding in traffic that is slower near schools, there's often a lot that's competing for drivers' attention, and the more aware that drivers are of you, the better chance you have for a safe ride. Safety vests can easily be worn over clothing, making them an easy addition to every ride.

3. Have a route

Before you fully commit to the cycling drop off, make sure you and your kids (if they're riding) are familiar with the route. A few test runs can help make young riders more confident and help parents know what kind of risks to look out for.

Small children may be eager and excited to bike to school. Getting them comfortable with the route can increase their awareness of the world around them, giving them the best chance at a safe ride. For parents who are using a trailer or bicycle attachment, identifying a route ahead of time can help plan for future issues, like detours, bad weather, tricky traffic areas, or potholes that should be avoided.

Make a plan that suits your family and follows the rules. It's best to double-check the ordinances in your area, such as whether riding on the sidewalk is permitted, and then ride accordingly. If bike lanes are available, do your best to use them.

In places where there are no bike lanes, follow relevant traffic laws. A review of these rules can be helpful: [Bike Safety Tips: English](#) [Spanish](#)

4. Ride together

It's true that there is safety in numbers. Try and get a group together for a morning commute. Ideally an adult can lead the group and another can take up the back and make sure nobody gets left behind.

If your kids are older and you're not riding with them, encourage them to ride with others. Groups are more visible to vehicle drivers and it's good to have a buddy if something happens.



This project is supported by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's One Bay Area Grant Program and the Go Sonoma Transportation Tax. Content provided by Bay Area Bicycle Law.