

BIKE COMMUNICATION

MS 6

DISCUSSION

BE PREDICTABLE

Much of being a good cyclist has to do with these two simple words. Make your intentions known to the other people around you. Drivers all obey the same sets of laws and rules. This is what makes it possible for so many cars to be on the road at the same time. The same thing is true for cyclists. If drivers can make an intelligent guess about what you are going to do, they will try to avoid you. It is up to you to communicate clearly what you are going to do and follow through in a safe and responsible manner. Similarly, you need to be paying attention to the cues that you get from drivers. That way you will be able to move safely around them as well. Eye contact, verbal communication, a friendly wave, and proper hand signals all facilitate you and the car drivers sharing the road safely.

HAND SIGNALS

See the handout below. Even if students have learned hand signals in the past, this does not mean they know or remember them. Have a student stand and demonstrate the signals for turning left, right, and stopping. Make sure the demonstrator does this facing away from the class so the left/right actions are presented correctly. Practice the hand signals as a class. The first cars did not have turn signals; drivers had to put their left arm out the window. This is why we use the left arm for signaling today. There are other good reasons as well. If you are riding on the right, traffic is on your left. This makes your left arm easiest to see. A right turn can also be communicated by

sticking the right arm straight out and pointing. The idea is to have a clear communication with the drivers around you. Using hand signals is not only good communication; it is also the law. Bike riders need to obey the same traffic laws as drivers. This means we need to signal our turns. Designers have tried putting turn signals on bikes but a bike is so narrow that it was too hard to tell which direction was being signaled, so we must use our hands. Remember to keep one hand on your handlebars at all times; that way, you are prepared if you need to maneuver quickly. Another reason some people prefer to use their left hand for both right and left turn signals is control. Most people are right handed. Not everybody is comfortable letting go with their right hand. Signaling with your left hand can help you to stay in control of your bike if you need to react quickly. The stopping hand signal is mainly used when you are riding with other cyclists. You use this hand signal to let the cyclists behind you know that you will be stopping soon so that they can prepare to stop, too. To let drivers know that you intend to stop, be ready to place at least one foot on the ground. This shows the driver that you are going to stop.

EYE CONTACT

This is the easiest way to communicate clearly with drivers. If you are able to make eye contact with the driver you will know that they see you. A friendly wave can also communicate that you see each other or that you will let them go first, or a thank you. Drivers do not want to hit cyclists. If they see you they will do their best to avoid you.

BELLS

Car drivers are not the only other people we need to communicate with when we are out riding our bike. We share the road with pedestrians and other bike riders as well. When you are on a bike path, a bell is an easy way to let others know that you are coming up behind them and want to pass. The sound of a bell can be louder and more distinctive than using your voice.

VOICE

Nonverbal communication is great and essential when riding your bike, but there will be times when you need your voice. If you do not have a bell on your bike you can call out "passing " or "on the left" to let other riders and pedestrians know you are approaching from behind and want to pass. If you need to keep both hands on the handlebars, you can use your voice to signal a turn. You would need to keep both hands on the handlebars if you were braking on a steep hill or navigating rough terrain. You should always try to use hand signals but don't take your hands off the handlebars if it does not feel safe. You also might use your voice if you can tell a driver or pedestrian cannot see you and is going to put you at risk. You always need to be respectful but it is OK to send out a verbal wake up call if you need to.



COMMUNICATING A TURN

