

'Cycling Shorts' -- Short Bicycle Education Messages

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This page includes several short messages to improve public knowledge of proper bicycle operation. These are intended for public service announcements, newspapers, news releases, etc. Some are directed at cyclists, others for parents and for motorists who share the road with cyclists.

"Share the Road" Short Messages

Share the road with bicycles. Cyclists should ride on the right side of the road and follow the same rules as other drivers. It is unsafe to ride on the wrong side and it is dangerous to ride on the sidewalk. Share the road.

There is much more to driving a bicycle than balance and steering. Many things we were taught as kids are wrong and some are dangerous. If you want to learn more, check your library for the video *Effective Cycling*.

Ride a bike to work! The safest way is by following traffic laws. Cyclists who make up their own rules by riding on the wrong side of the road or on sidewalks are five times as likely to crash. Be predictable and act like the driver of a vehicle.

Share the road with bicycles. A motorist passing a bicycle must wait until it is safe to pass and then give adequate clearance. A cyclist should try to make it easy for a motorist to pass but only if it is safe. When it is not safe to allow a car to pass, a cyclist should use the full lane.

Learn advanced methods to **drive a bike!** A bicycle is a vehicle that should be driven according to the rules of the road. You can learn new techniques in a *Cycling Savvy* class. On the Web, check out cyclingsavvy.org/ for information.

Traffic Law Messages

Rules of the Road: Bicycle drivers must follow the same traffic laws as other drivers for safe, fast and efficient travel. For example, the law says to ride on the right. Pedestrians walk on the left, facing traffic, so they can sidestep off the road if necessary. Some people think it is safer to ride like a pedestrian to "see traffic coming". But you cannot sidestep a bike. Riding on the left is both illegal and dangerous -- over three times the crash risk.

Position on the Road: Bicycle traffic law tells us to ride as near to the right side of the roadway as "practicable" (practice+able). It does not say as near as *possible*, because "hugging the curb" is often unsafe due to road hazards and because it invites motorists to pass where there is not enough room. Be courteous and let cars pass when you can, but always maintain a safety zone to the right.

Making Turns: The traffic rule for making a turn is exactly the same for bicycles as for other vehicles -- merge to the appropriate position (right for right turns, left for left turns), yield to any traffic that has the right of way, and turn. Getting into position for a left turn may involve merging across lanes of traffic. If traffic is heavy, you need to start doing this early to use gaps in the traffic. Otherwise, there may not be a gap when you need one. Beginners, who have not yet developed the skill to merge and yield, may make pedestrian-style turns instead.

Yielding: When you merge to another lane on the roadway, you must first yield to any traffic that has the right of way. Yielding means looking back to see what is coming while riding straight down the road. This is a skill that takes practice to master. Try to signal your move if possible. Skip the signal if your hand is needed for control or to use the brake.

Being Seen: An unseen cyclist is in great danger. About 30 percent of serious cycling casualties occur at night although only about four percent of cycling is done then. The reflectors that come with new bikes are inadequate for nighttime visibility. Always use both a headlight and taillight if you ride in the dark.

About Sidewalks: Traffic law usually allows bicycle riding on sidewalks, but don't do it. Accident studies show that even slow sidewalk riding has about double the accident rate as riding on the road. The danger increases with speed. If you ride on the sidewalk, every intersection and even every driveway is a potential collision site. Motorists crossing your path do not look for conflicting traffic on the sidewalk, especially if you are coming from the "wrong way".

Use Four Layers of Safety

There is much more to learn about cycling than you were taught as a kid.

1. Don't CAUSE an accident, follow the rules of road. About half of car-bike collisions are caused by the cyclist. A bicycle is a vehicle and should be driven according to the rules of the road. This means drive on the right (not the left or the sidewalk), stop for red lights & stop signs, and use lights at night. The reflectors on your bike help, but are not sufficient either for your safety or to comply with the law.
2. Deter motorist mistakes. Be alert for potential accident situations and be assertive to stop a collision before it happens. Sometimes you have to use enough of the lane to discourage someone from passing where it is not safe.
3. Drive defensively to escape hazards. In case you can't prevent another driver's mistake, plan an "escape route" to avoid a crash. Don't "hug the curb"; leave a safety zone at the edge of the road. Learn and practice emergency maneuvers, just in case.

4. Use safety equipment to reduce injury. A helmet and gloves will not prevent an accident but they may reduce injuries if one occurs. Don't neglect your last line of defense.

A Bike is NOT a Toy. -- It is your child's first vehicle.

Teach your child "Drive your Bike!" There is much more to learn about cycling than you were taught as a kid.

Prevent mistakes that cause accidents. The most common cause of cycling fatalities to young children is "driveway rideout", where they fail to stop and yield before entering a roadway. Other big mistakes include swerving in traffic, running stop signs and lights, riding "wrong way" and riding without lights at night.

Who teaches your children? Most kids get swimming lessons from carefully trained Red Cross swimming instructors. But who teaches children how to drive a bike? What training and qualifications do these teachers have? You may need to learn cycling and then teach them yourself.

Capabilities of Children. Properly qualified instructors can teach children of age 7-8 to ride safely on quiet residential streets. By age 10, children can be taught to handle moderate traffic and by 12, almost any streets. But this teaching takes time and knowledgeable teachers.

Benefits: Besides making their cycling safe, proper cycling will free children from depending on "mom's taxi". It also eventually makes them safer car drivers.

Cycling Education Message

When we were kids, many of us had swimming lessons through the Red Cross. Did you know that a Red Cross swimming instructor has to pass some tough tests to be certified? Just to get into a training class, the candidate must pass a written and swimming skills test. Then take a 36 hour class with many skills to be mastered ending with more tests. And then the instructor must follow a carefully prepared syllabus while teaching.

Compare all of this with any "bike safety" instruction you received. You probably heard some tips from an authority figure, such as a parent or police officer. Chances are that person passed no cycling tests, had no training and likely had little experience, especially for riding in traffic. Your lessons were bits of advice made up on the spot -- things that "sound good".

No wonder most people are badly misinformed about bicycle driving. Yes, I said driving! A bicycle is a vehicle -- Ohio Law says so. It is to be operated under the same laws as are other vehicles. This means bicycles should be driven on the roadway, not on

the sidewalk. And you should drive on the right side of the road, obey traffic lights, use lights at night and follow other traffic laws.

Some people think a person on a bike is some kind of pedestrian. This is wrong. A bike can easily go 4 or 5 times as fast as a person walking. Even faster downhill. Also, bikes cannot stop on a dime. They have brakes like other vehicles. They cannot turn in a stride or step sideways or backwards like pedestrians either. This is why bicycles must be operated like vehicles.

You can learn more from a nice little booklet *Ohio Bicycling Street Smarts* from the Ohio Department of Public Safety. See if your city hall or police department have copies or check the library. Also, you can find cycling education articles on the website of the Ohio Bicycle Federation:www.ohiobike.org.

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