Best practices for teaching children 18 months - 5 years old how to ride.

Strider Balance Bikes are designed specifically to help children learn balance and coordination BEFORE pedaling. The simple, no-pedal design allows children of all abilities to learn how to ride on two wheels, instilling considerable confidence and bike handling skills. Strider Bikes encourage the development of spatial awareness, balance, and basic motor skills as early as possible so all children can reach their maximum riding potential.

Ensure your child’s bike riding success by following these four simple steps:

1. Adjust the bike properly to fit the child.
2. Be a cheerleader, not a coach.
3. Let the child set the pace.
4. Support the child — NOT the bike!

Strider Sports Int'l, Inc.
www.striderbikes.com
1. Adjust the bike properly to fit the child!

**Saddle Height**
Saddle height is the most critical adjustment. Adjust the seat of the bike so both of the child’s feet are flat on the ground and there is only a slight bend in the knee. A good starting height is 1” less than the child’s inseam.

Determine if the bike needs an extra long seatpost to fit the child properly. The Strider 12 Sport comes with both the standard length and the extra long seatpost included.

Kids grow quickly. Be sure to adjust the bike every few months.

**Handlebar Height**
The second most critical adjustment is handlebar height. The best starting point for handlebar height is to set it with respect to the saddle. If the saddle is at its lowest setting, set the handlebar to also be at its lowest setting, etc. You should then adjust the handlebars to a height that is most comfortable for the child as they progress with their riding.

**Safety Gear**
Adjust the crown of the helmet so it doesn’t move while the child rides. The helmet should be worn low in front, slightly above the eyebrows to protect the forehead. There should not be slack in any of the helmet when properly adjusted. The helmet should fit snugly, but not uncomfortably tight. The chin strap should be worn well back against the throat, not on the point of the chin.

To check the basic fit grab the helmet with both hands and twist it gently to the left and to the right. If the helmet fits properly, the skin on the forehead will move as the helmet moves. If the skin does not move, the helmet is too loose. To check the strap tension grab the helmet with both hands and try to remove it by rolling the helmet forward and backward as far as you can. Make a serious effort but be gentle, THIS IS IMPORTANT. If you can roll the helmet forward so far that it blocks the child’s vision, or backward far enough to expose the forehead, it doesn’t fit correctly. Repeat sizing steps until helmet movement is minimal.

Don’t forget shoes! Children should always wear closed toed shoes while riding. Remember, these are their brakes, and they need to protect those precious piggies!

2. Be a cheerleader, not a coach.

Many children will instinctively throw a leg over the Strider and want to go, go, go. Some children only want to spend a minute or two walking their Strider around at first. Encourage them no matter their level of interest and give them praise for any amount of time they spend on the Strider.
3. **Let the child set the pace.**

Some kids are cautious and may not even sit on the seat at first. This is OK! Their security is in their feet at this point, and we want them to feel secure. As they become comfortable walking around with the bike between their legs and using the handlebar, they will start to “trust” the saddle. Some kids get to this point within minutes, and others may take weeks, but all children will eventually get there. Striding is attained when kids transition from 100% of their trust in their feet to 100% of their trust in the saddle (feet off the ground and balancing). Let them transition at their own pace... they’ll be striding along with their feet up on the footrests before you know it!

Don’t rush pedaling. Striding and practicing balance is fun! Even if children appear to be striding like a pro, moving to a pedal bike too soon can derail progress. The weight of a pedal bike is significantly more than a Strider Bike, and handling that extra weight can be very frustrating to a child. Let them continue to practice and perfect their balance and bike-handling skills. Be confident that the time spent on their Strider Bike will help them easily transition to pedaling when the time comes and with the improved skills they gained it will be a safer and more enjoyable ride. For some, this could be their forever bike!

4. **Support the child — NOT the bike!**

We instinctively want to help the child by holding onto the bike to keep it from tipping; **don’t do this.** The child **must** be allowed to feel the bike tip sideways to learn how to keep it from tipping. If the adult supports the bike when it tips to one side, the child mistakenly thinks the most stable place for the bike is tipped over to the side. If the child needs assurance, walk next to them and hang onto the back of their shirt so they feel safe.

**Achieving Balance...**

In order to achieve balance, three of the body’s systems must be working together effectively: The visual (eyes), proprioception (sense of where the body is) and the vestibular (ears). The only one of these that is hard wired into us at birth is the vestibular. As a baby this is where we begin to learn balance. As we grow to a toddler, we combine the vestibular and the visual. It is around age 3 that a transition takes place from vestibular control in conjunction with vision to that based on touch and sensation. This means that preschool aged children develop their vestibular system and build the sensory integration that leads to the maturation of the eye movements required for efficient reading and learning. Since balance combines inputs from this entire system, all of these sensory functions must work precisely to form our sense of balance. Understanding this helps us understand how all of these sensory integration skills that are required for balance, are also required for learning systems overall. Reading difficulties can occur and learning development will be delayed when the relationship between balance and other systems is out of sync. “When kids stabilize themselves from an unstable pose, they learn how to focus faster and more efficiently,” says Catherine Jackson, Ph.D., Chair of the Department of Kinesiology at California State University at Fresno.
What ages are appropriate for striding vs. pedaling?

A child can start learning balance and riding a Strider as soon as he/she is able to walk!

Balance skills typically begin to develop at about age 3. Parents should not introduce a pedal bike to children until age 4 or 5 when they have longer legs, weigh more, and are capable of handling a much heavier bike.

Some children with special needs may need more time and practice to transition to a pedal bike, or in many instances, the Strider 16 or 20 is their forever bike!

Signs that children are ready to transition to a pedal bike:
- They can propel the bike and then stride with their feet up for long distances.
- They can handle the bike on a downhill without putting their feet down.
- They can effectively steer through or around obstacles in their path.
- They want to transition to a pedal bike: Nothing ruins the fun more in a child’s mind than being told what to do!

Checklist for the transition to a pedal bike:
- Choose the lightest bike that fits the child.
- NEVER USE TRAINING WHEELS! This gives children a false sense of balance, and trainers will only set them back.
- Take the pedals off the bike at first to allow them time to get used to the different size, weight, and handling of the bike. Fit the bike like you would their Strider: with a slight bend in the knee when both feet are flat on the ground.
- Transitioning takes time, and every child is different. It could take some children a day, or a week, or a month. Enjoy the experience and don’t rush.
- When they are cruising comfortably, re-attach the pedals and be ready to cheer them on!
- You may need to give them a little push to get the momentum going at first, but take time to explain and show them how to propel by pushing downward on the front pedal to get started.
- Support the child, not the bike. Often, just a simple hand on their back to let them know you are there is sufficient. Most kids who are transitioning to a pedal bike from a balance bike don’t require any assistance at all.
By following this simple guide your child will be successfully Striding in no time!

Don’t forget to tag us on Social Media! @StriderBikes #StrideOn!