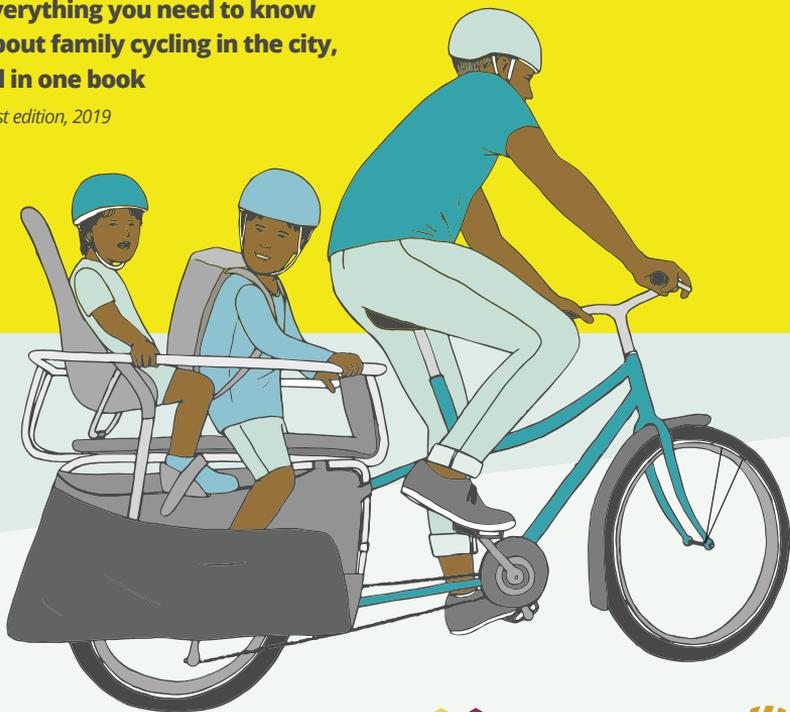


# The Toronto Cycling Handbook: Family Edition

**Everything you need to know  
about family cycling in the city,  
all in one book**

*First edition, 2019*



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## **Join over 1.4 million Torontonians who ride bicycles because it's convenient, healthy, affordable and fun.**

This handbook will teach you about family cycling, from pregnancy through grade 8. When riding your bikes in Toronto, always remember to use your best judgement, take your time and have fun! For the original handbook, go to [www.cycleto.ca/handbook](http://www.cycleto.ca/handbook)

The Toronto Cycling Handbook: Family Edition, First Edition. April 2019.  
Text: Sam Perry, Sarah Bradley  
Illustrations and design: Jay Darr  
This handbook was adapted from The Toronto Cyclists Handbook, which was first published in 2010 by Cycle Toronto, in partnership with CultureLink and with the support of the Toronto Foundation. The second edition was published in 2016.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CultureLink is a settlement and community organization with 30 years' experience in developing and delivering services to meet the needs of diverse communities. They are dedicated to facilitating the active participation and integration of newcomers and the broader community, recognizing the interdependence of these groups in our society. Learn more at [www.culturelink.ca](http://www.culturelink.ca)



Cycle Toronto is a member-supported not-for-profit organization that works to make Toronto a healthy, safe, and vibrant cycling city for all. They focus on advocacy, education and encouragement to shape policy and infrastructure, and build community to transform Toronto's cycling culture. They engage a diversity of people in their work, pursuing evidence-based solutions that make cycling a viable option for all Torontonians. Become a member: [www.cycleto.ca/join](http://www.cycleto.ca/join)



The Toronto Cycling Think & Do Tank is a multidisciplinary, multi-sector research project focused on increasing cycling as a primary transportation choice. Their mission is to study cycling as it intersects with cities, people and society, to better understand how to accelerate the widespread use of the bicycle as a means of transportation.



The Metcalf Foundation's mission is to enhance the effectiveness of people and organizations working together to help Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society.

# /// Reasons to ride as a family

## Healthy

Get active together! Daily physical activity has proven benefits for the physical and mental wellbeing of kids (not to mention you!). Kids need 60 minutes of energetic activity every day.

## Green

Go green as a family! Contribute to cleaner air and less-crowded streets by taking your bikes instead of a car or bus. Help your kids develop their lifelong sense of stewardship for mother earth.

## Affordable

Owning and operating a bicycle or even a cargo bike is a fraction of the cost of a car or transit. Once your family owns bikes, they are free to operate!

## Fun

Biking together means exploring neighbourhoods, parks, trails and the waterfront. Enjoy the fresh air, smells, sights and sounds.

## Convenient

A bicycle is often faster than public transit or sitting in traffic. You can go where you want, when you want, as soon as you hop on. A bike is also a great way for kids to travel independently.

## Safe

A growing network of bike lanes, cycle tracks, trails and quiet streets makes cycling increasingly safe and enjoyable for the whole family.

## Connected

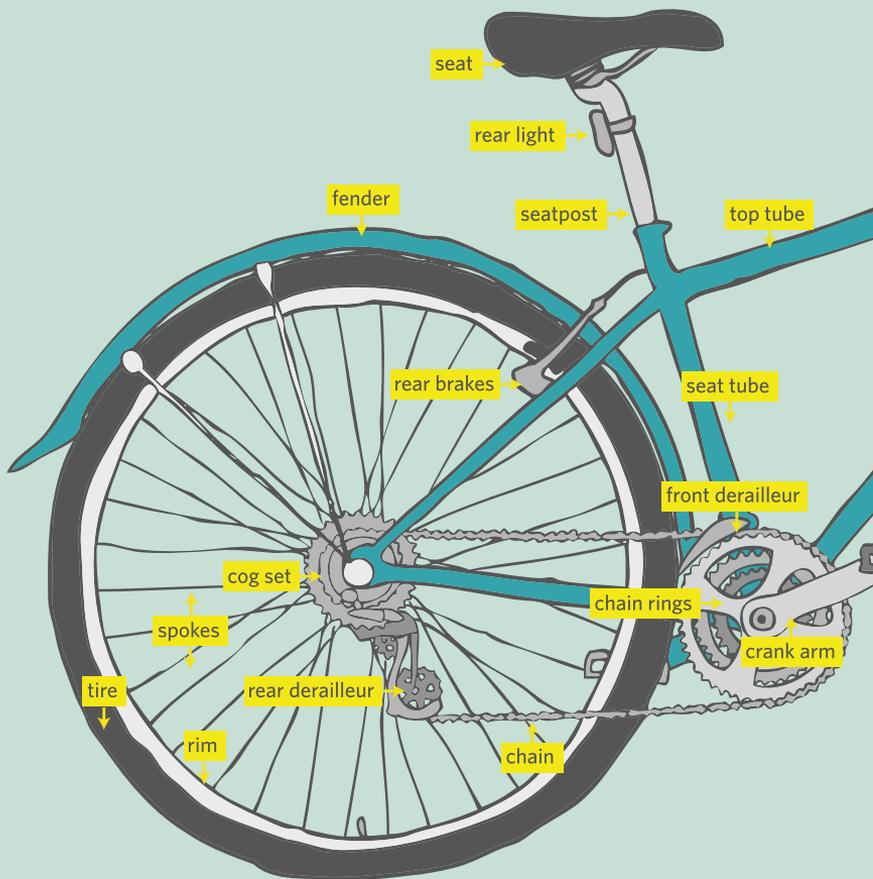
Get to know other families in your neighbourhood. Why not start a Bike Train or Walk 'n' Roll Parade to school?



**Choosing routes which were mostly on bike lanes, bike trails and quiet streets helped build comfort and confidence.**

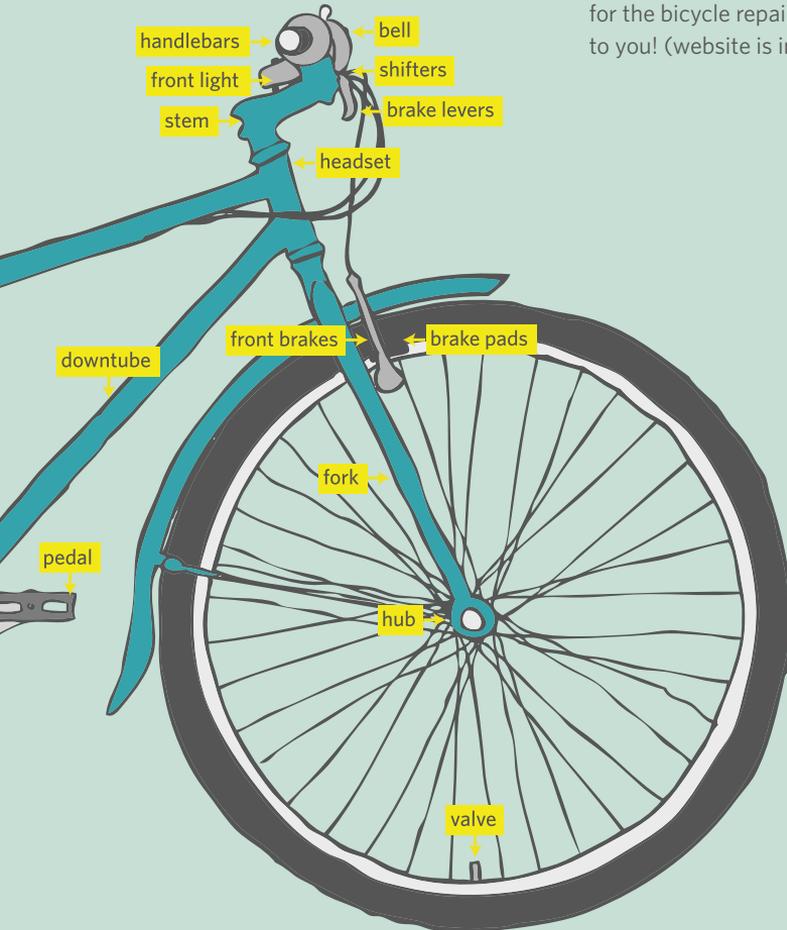
**Our daughter was incredibly stalwart—I remember her yelling with glee as we cycled through a minor blizzard. She felt unstoppable, fearless and strong.** ”

# /// The bicycle





You can learn to fix your own bike or buy a used bike and bike parts at drop-in community bicycle work spaces, located across the city. Check out [www.cycleto.ca/DIY](http://www.cycleto.ca/DIY) for the bicycle repair space closest to you! (website is in English)



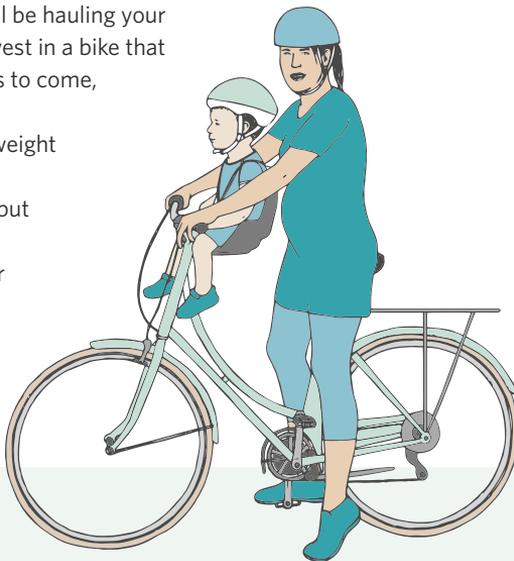
## /// Biking while pregnant

### Yes, you can bike while pregnant!

Many women bike while pregnant. Pedalling is a good way to get low-impact activity and, in later pregnancy when it's harder to walk, biking gets you around easily. Everyone's experience is different, so find what works for you. Go slowly, take quiet streets, and enjoy the view.

#### Tips:

- Upright, step-through bikes are best: they're easy to mount, comfortable, and spacious for pregnant bellies.
- Think about the future: you'll be hauling your little one up to age ~5, so invest in a bike that will suit your needs for years to come, like a long-tail (see cover).
- Baskets and panniers keep weight off your back.
- Lower your seat so you can put your feet down comfortably.
- Protect your wrists: consider investing in handlebar grips that reduce the pressure.



“

**Biking was a fantastic way to get around the city while pregnant. I biked right up to the day I went into labour. It was much easier on my body than walking and more energizing.**”

# /// Biking with babies & toddlers (age 0-4)

## Support, safety, and snacks

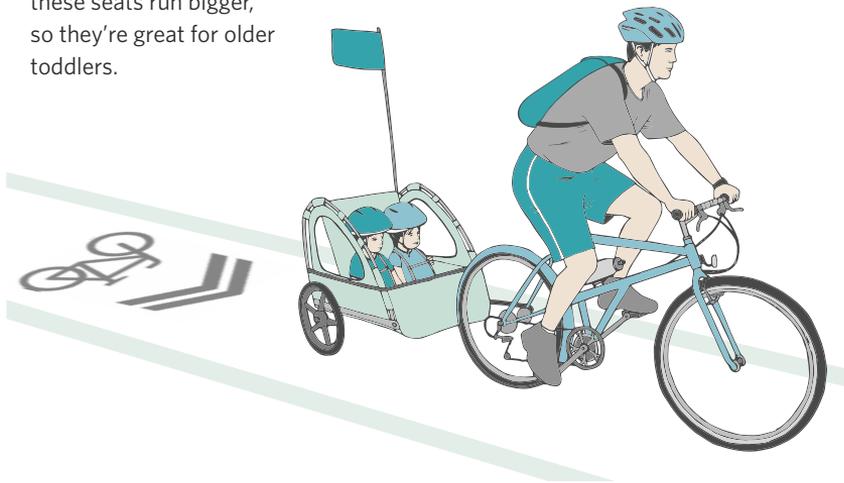
Biking with your baby is a lovely way to introduce them to life on two wheels. Always consult a your child's pediatrician first, and be sure to fully support their head and neck using a "car" seat in a...

- **Trailer:** one- or two-child versions... also great for hauling groceries!
- **Cargo bike:** large bike with a cargo bay... take the whole neighbourhood for a ride!

Once your little one has developed neck strength, you can transition to the toddler setup:

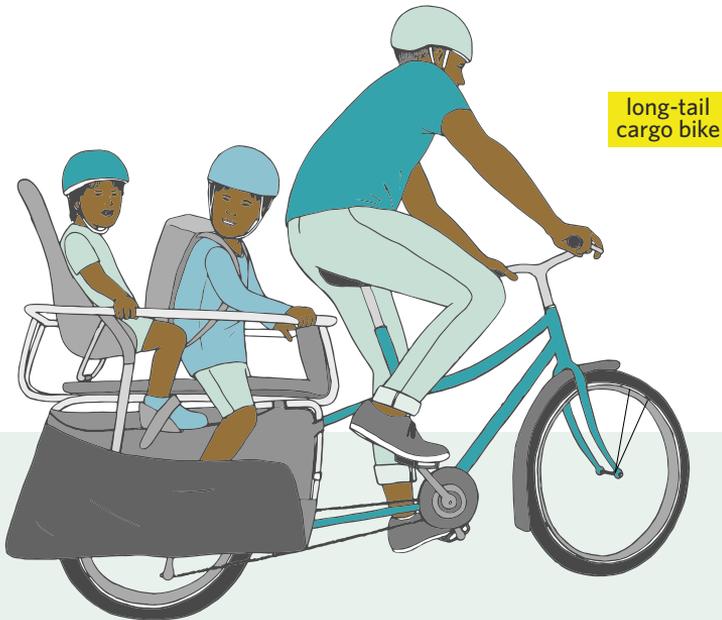
- **Front child seat:** mounted near the handlebars... child has a great view of the world!
- **Rear frame seat:** mounted to the frame in the rear... child has a great view of your backside :-)
- **Rear rack seat:** mounted on a rear rack... these seats run bigger, so they're great for older toddlers.

bike with trailer



## Consider

- **Helmet:** safety first and required by law for people 17 and under.
- **Space:** rear bike seats need extra space, so skip the backpack and invest in panniers.
- **Balance:** child seats make your bike more top-heavy. Ride with extra caution and invest in a stable kickstand.
- **Visibility:** fun items like balloons and flags keep junior occupied while giving a visual cue to people driving.
- **Fit:** make sure the child seat fits your bike! You don't want your heels to hit the seat as you pedal.
- **The bike minivan:** long-tail bikes can accommodate two rear child seats and one front child seat, plus pull a trailer.
- **Get a boost:** if you're riding with your child using a rear trailer or cargo bike, consider an e-assist bike to carry the extra weight of growing kids.



# /// Learning to ride (age 3-7)

## Find the balance

Biking with your young child opens up exciting possibilities! Of course, you can still chauffeur them the same ways you did as a toddler: front or rear seats, trailers, or cargo bikes.

As your child grows out of their seat and becomes ready to learn to ride on their own, you want to help them build their skills gradually. The first goal is balance. Rather than a tricycle or training wheels, use a balance bike, a two-wheeled bike without pedals that your child pushes with their feet. A balance bike helps your child learn gliding, stopping, and starting. (Tip: create your own balance bike by simply removing the pedals from a regular child's bike!)

Once your child has mastered the basics, it's time to start practicing the next skill: pedalling on a two-wheeled bike. Make sure their feet can touch the ground when they're sitting, so

there's less chance of falling. Find a flat or slightly downward-sloping area to practice. When they're ready to try, remind them:

*"Keep your handlebars as straight as you can."*

*"Push with your feet to get some speed."*

*"Lift your feet onto the pedals and glide."*

*"When you're ready, try pedalling."*

When you're riding around town with your little learner, they can practice their riding skills in a supported way using some special gear:

- **Trailer bike:** a bike-like trailer, complete with seat, pedals, and handlebars, that gives your child the feeling of riding on their own (but you're still in control).
- **Tow bar:** a bar that attaches a regular child's bike to the back of an adult bike, creating an experience similar to a trailer bike.

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## Tips

- **Helmet:** still a must.
- **Bell or horn:** also a must for kids.
- **Lights:** you can never be too visible while biking.

- **Extras:** flags, streamers, and balloons increase visibility and add fun.
- **Sidewalks:** your child—and everyone under 14—can ride on the sidewalk. You—and everyone 14 or older—should be riding on the road.

## /// Learning to ride to school (age 5-10)

### Taking quiet routes to build confidence

Biking to school is the best! This is where your little one gets their first taste of transportation independence. Children (13 and under) can ride on sidewalks and you can walk alongside your child. You can also plan routes through parks and trails for a low-stress ride. Always yield to people travelling more slowly than you. You'll want to help your child learn to pedal and use their coaster (foot) brakes as they begin to ride faster. Consider getting a group of parents together to run a Bike Train to and from school.

Make sure that your child's bike fits well. With a growing child, you'll want to buy used, or from a store that has a trade-in program. There are also options that let you keep riding together, like a DIY tandem or a long-tail cargo bike that lets you tow a kid's bike so your child can ride some of the way.



“ **Biking to school at an early age is key to learning to love cycling... as long as I'm biking with my children, they will bike on their own all over the city, on the road from grade 2 and up.** ”



I found that a **tandem bicycle** was the easiest way to get children of different ages and abilities to participate at the same time. With a tandem, children don't get tired on long rides and as they grow older, you can feel them getting stronger and stronger. ”

### Tips

- **Helmet:** still a must.
- **Bell or horn:** a must for young riders.
- **U-Lock:** make sure your child's bike is still there for the ride home.
- **Lights:** a must for riding in the dark or during rain, snow, etc.
- **Sidewalks:** your child—and everyone under 14—can ride on the sidewalk. You—and everyone 14 or older—should be riding in the street.

### /// What's a Bike Train?

A Bike Train is a group of parents and children riding together, with adults rotating to act as ride leaders. It's a fun, low-stress way to start cycling to school and to get to know other parents in your neighbourhood.

### /// On your way

Biking as a family will allow you to spend time together, keep you active and enjoy the sights and sounds around you. Here are a couple of resources to help you on your biking journey.

- [Toronto Cycling Network Map](#)
- [Google Maps](#): choose cycling directions
- [Toronto Cyclists Handbook](#)
- [Ontario Young Cyclists Guide](#)
- [School Travel Planning Toolkits](#)
- [Family Biking Guide](#), Momentum
- [Bike to School Week Guide](#), CultureLink
- DIY bike repair spaces, like CultureLink's [Bike Hub](#)
- [Cycle Toronto workshops](#)
- [Bike to School Project](#), which works directly with students, teachers and parents to nurture a bike culture in schools

# /// Biking to school (age 9-13)

## From sidewalks to streets

The next step in your child's bike development is learning to ride on quiet streets. Although they're allowed to ride on the sidewalk until their 14th birthday, it's important to practice riding in the street before then. Important skills include:

### Starting

- Starting position:
  - bum in front of the seat.
  - one foot on the ground.
  - one foot on a pedal, ~¾ of the way up.
- Push off with your ground foot.
- Push down with your pedal foot.
- Slide your bum onto the seat.
- Start pedalling.

### Stopping

- Always use both brakes.
- Squeeze brakes gently.
- Slide your bum forward.
- Put one foot on the ground; leave the other foot on the pedal.

### Straight line riding

- Get a good start.
- Keep your handlebars straight and try not to swerve.

- Find a practice space with a painted line—tennis or basketball courts work great!—and try to ride on top of the line.

### Hand signals

- Left turn = left arm straight out.
- Right turn = right arm straight out or left arm bent and hand facing up.
- Stop = left arm straight out and down, downward box shape.



*left-hand turn*



*stop*



*right-hand turn*



*alternate  
right-hand turn*

### Turning

- Whichever direction you're turning, that pedal should be up.
- Right turn = right pedal up.
- Left turn = left pedal up.

## Gears

1. Start in the lowest gear: largest cog in the rear.
2. Pedal until you build momentum.
3. Gear up one gear; if you have shifters on both sides of your handlebars, use the ones on the right first.
4. If your pedalling starts to feel slow and like you're having to push hard, go down one gear.
5. When slowing down, remember to gear down; when stopping, gear down all the way to first gear.
6. Tip: many children's bikes have a lot of gears, making it difficult to learn to use them effectively. Simplify the situation by setting your child's chain on the middle chainring in front and just leaving it there; tell them to use only the right-hand (rear) shifter to change gears.

## Maintenance

- **Essential gear:** floor pump with a gauge, bike chain lubricant, rags.
- **Air:** show your child how to pump their tires. Check the maximum pressure on the tire sidewall (look for "PSI") and pump to slightly less than that number.
- **Brakes:** show your child how to check their brakes by pushing the bike forward and squeezing each brake.

- **Chain:** wipe the chain with a dry rag, put one drop of lube on each link, pedal backwards to work the lube into the chain, and wipe off the excess lube with another rag.

Your child may want to start riding for longer distances. If they get tired midway through, you can take your bikes home on public transit. If two parents are riding together, your child can ride in between. When it comes to bikes, many pre-teens prefer mountain bikes for their versatility. Some middle and high schools have bike clubs that run programming, like skills workshops and group rides.



## /// FAQs

While every family's experience is unique, there are common strategies to build a support network as you begin to bike as a family. Think of this list as a roadmap to get you started.



### Where do I begin?

**Start small:** practice riding in a park or quiet street until you're 100% confident biking with your family.

**Connect:** let people know you want to ride with your family, and plan a regular time to meet up and practice, swap gear, and share tips.



### How can I connect with other parents?

Check your school, library, or community centre's bulletin board.

Spread the word at parent-teacher nights or other social events at your school.

On social media? Put out a call to connect with families who bike, tagging

local cycling organizations and using a hashtag like [#FamilyBiking](#).



### How do I plan a route?

Find a route that works for you. Remember, the route that feels most safe and comfortable might not be the most direct one.

An old-fashioned paper map is a great way to start planning your route.

View Toronto's Cycling Network Map online at [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca). Get a hard copy of the map at City Hall, your local library, or civic centre.

You can also use Google Maps' bike directions, and ask experienced cyclists in your community.

### /// Nice-to-haves

Here are a few bits and bobs to make your family biking experience smooth and stress-free.

- Sturdy center kickstand
- Five-point harness to support your child's upper body
- Front rack for storage
- Panniers to hold clothing and snacks

- Bungee cords
- Lightweight blanket, jacket, and backpack cover
- Warm or cold drinks in a travel mug
- Sunscreen
- Bluetooth speaker
- Big bike bell that kids can ring
- U-lock (compact and sturdy) and chain lock (versatile)



## Where can I find used bikes and parts?

Try DIY bike shops, co-ops and community centres.

Go online (Kijiji, LetGo, Craigslist) and search by location. You can also connect with parents and educators to coordinate a garage sale or part swap.



## How do I make sure my child's bike and helmet fit?

**For helmets:** follow the 2-V-1 rule: 2 fingers between your eyebrow and your helmet, straps form a “V” around your ears, 1 finger distance between the strap and your chin.

### /// Follow the 2-V-1 rule

1



2 fingers between your eyebrow and your helmet.

2



The straps should form a “V” around your ears.

3



1 finger should fit between the strap and your chin.

**For bikes:** find the right wheel size based on your child's inseam measurement (bike shops have size charts, or find one online). Adjust the seat with a multi-tool so that you child's knees are slightly bent when their foot is at the bottom of the pedal stroke. Adjust the handlebars so that your child can keep a comfortable hold and turn with their elbows slightly bent.



## What are the options to carry my child on a bike?

There are many options and it comes down to your comfort and how close you want your child to be as you ride.

Choose from a front carrier that nestles between your handlebars, back carrier that attaches to a sturdy rear rack, rear trailer, cargo bike (front and rear-loading options), or longtail (which allows children to sit on a platform behind the driver).

If you are carrying more than one child, look into electric-assist options.

Check out the Red Tricycle Guide for options. [redtri.com](http://redtri.com)

Smooth sailing: ride slowly and look for potholes and other obstructions when you have a small person on board.

# Cycling is for every family!

Start your child on a journey to health, happiness, and freedom!



“

Our daughter is now 17 and bikes to high school every day. She also bikes around the city on her own—both for fun and for errands...

**Cycling has empowered her and made her feel like the city is hers—to enjoy and to take care of.** ”

/// Learn more at

[www.culturelink.ca](http://www.culturelink.ca)

[www.cycleto.ca](http://www.cycleto.ca)