

## **Hills Topic #1: Riding UP!**

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1. Train your kids well by the way you ride. If you can't ride up a hill in a straight line, on the right, get off and walk. "Snaking" up hills puts you in the line of TWO lanes/directions of traffic and makes you completely unpredictable to motorists. Teach your kids to get off and walk when they can't control the front wheel of their bike ("keep it going straight ahead") on a hill.
2. If your kid is riding a geared bicycle, train them to gear down "before it gets hard to pedal." Practice going through all the gears on the flat (the waterfront trail at Magnuson Park is perfect for this) so they get a sense of what makes it harder or easier to pedal.

## **Hills Topic #2: Riding DOWN!**

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New riders do not have a good sense of speed, and riding a bike fast is fun (for most of us, anyway). This can make cycling downhill with kids dangerous (not to mention nervewracking for parents). Here's how to train your kids to approach downslopes safely:

1. Start by making sure they have good braking technique.

Coaster brakes: If their bike has coaster brakes, train them to "pump" the brakes for quick stops or for regaining control if they are going fast: BRAKE-let up a little-BRAKE-let up a little-STEP ON THE BRAKES.

Hand brakes: If they have hand brakes train them to BRAKE WITH BOTH HANDS at the same time, putting more effort into the front (left hand) brake. Some of us were trained to apply the rear brake first, to avoid going over the handlebars, but the front brake has most of the stopping power, and applying pressure to both at the same time will enable you to stop efficiently without doing an endover. Test this out with your kids by pushing your bikes forward, hard, and applying just one brake at a time. The front brake will make the bike stop; the back will make it skid. Then test it out using both brakes at the same time.

2. Practice first on "safe" hills. When I am working on a skill with kids I go to a place where the "worst outcome" is something we can all live with! A grassy hill (Laurelhurst park has some good ones) is a great place to begin downhill practice, as is a gently sloping neighborhood street with a long, flat "rideout" at the end. The trail that goes over Kite Hill in Magnuson park is a GREAT place to practice downhill skills for more advanced riders (it has a pretty steep slope, plus gravel!)
3. Lead from behind. Kids without a lot of cycling experience cannot tell when they are going too fast to stop or regain control of the bike, but you can help them develop that sense by calling out braking instructions as you go. Make sure they can hear you, and talk through what you are doing on your own bike--and what they should be doing on theirs: "I can feel my bike going faster; it's time to begin braking.  
Gentle pressure to slow down, now hard on the brakes to stop!"
4. With kids, I always approach a steep downslope with the reminder: "OK, we're going down a hill here. Remember: both hands on the brakes (or BRAKE-BRAKE-STOP for coaster brakes) and keep your bike under control!"

The goal is control, not speed. It's fun to ride fast if you're under control and can stop; it's not fun to ride fast if you're out of control.

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