

## GUIDE TO CYCLING WITH AUTISM #1

# How does Autism affect learning to cycle?

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Cycling is a great way to travel, get active and reduce our impact on the planet. ecobirmingham believe people of all abilities and differing needs should feel confident riding a bike.

It is possible for autistic people to learn to ride a bike, but they will need more help to do so. It may take them a lot longer to learn to ride than a neurotypical person. Here are some of the ways in which autism can affect learning to cycle, with some possible solutions:

### THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND SENSORY OVERLOAD

An autistic child may have preferences about where they learn to cycle. They may not like a park that is too busy. Some places will cause them greater sensory overload. They may have an attachment to a particular place. They will not learn if they do not like the learning environment.

Choose a learning environment where your child is comfortable and where there is less chance of sensory overload.

### MANUAL HANDLING OF THE BIKE

An autistic child may struggle with the manual handling of a bike, as well as with getting on and off. You are allowed to help with this. Encourage them to use the handlebars to keep hold of the bike at all times, from when they first approach the bike to when they are sitting on the bike. Talk to them about how to handle the bike. Give praise. They should keep both hands on the handlebars at all times, and not hold the bike by the frame, saddle or pedals.

### BEING DISTRACTED BY THE BIKE

Some autistic children will get attached to particular mechanical parts of the bike. They can become distracted by bells, lights, the movement of the chain and wheels.

Encourage them to concentrate on the task in hand and not to play with bells, lights etc. While they are learning to pedal, you can temporarily remove bells and lights, and put them back on the bike when your child has learned to pedal consistently.

### PERCEPTION OF MOVEMENT

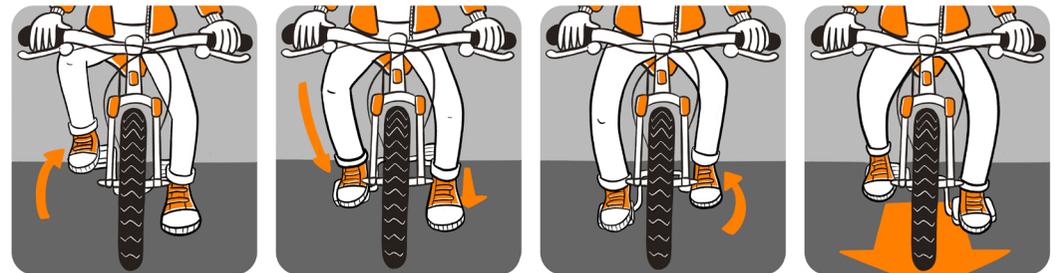
Some autistic children perceive movement differently to neurotypical children. They may attempt to pedal backwards; they may struggle to pedal in a straight line, instead preferring to cycle in a circle; they may have difficulty in making the connection between moving their legs and making the bike move. Whichever phase of learning they are in - scooting or pedalling - encourage them to move their legs more. Talk to them about movement. Use active verbs like "pedal" and "push" to increase their understanding.

## GUIDE TO CYCLING WITH AUTISM #1 HOW DOES AUTISM AFFECT LEARNING TO CYCLE?

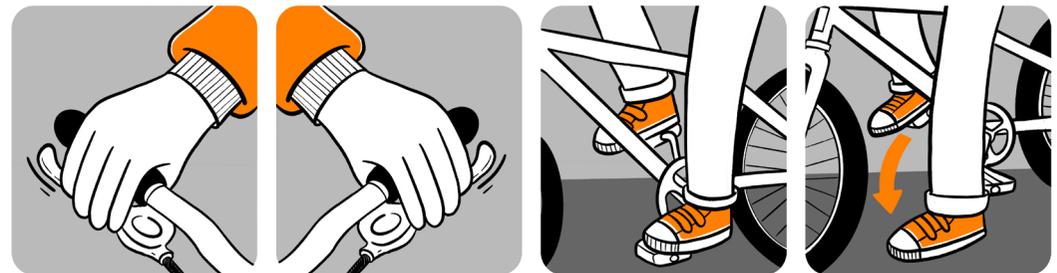


### BREAKING IT DOWN

Two of the key things that need to be learned are pedalling, and braking. Both involve a sequence of actions. Break down the sequences as much as possible. Find language that your child understands. Does your child respond better to single-word commands or sentences? Repeat what you are teaching them often. Give praise.



**Pedalling** - right foot on the pedal, left foot on the ground; then push down with the right foot, push forward with the left foot, and raise the left foot on to the left pedal. Keep both feet moving, and on the pedals.



**Braking** - stop pedalling; squeeze the left brake; squeeze the right brake; keep the hands on the handlebars; keep the feet on the pedals as long as possible and finish with one foot on the ground and one foot on the pedal.