Post iCan Bike Spotting Tips

Practice is the most important component following our program. Of particular importance, we highly encourage you to take your rider out as often as possible immediately following the program. The first few weeks after the program are imperative for sustaining and improving upon the skills just learned. Remember, practice makes permanent!

Reminders

- Helmets are not optional - *always* wear a helmet! Parents are the role model for this rule. If you ride, please remember to wear a helmet… remember that your child learns from observing you.
- Flat open parking lots or outdoor running tracks make the best practice areas.
- Minimal obstacles and distractions reduce fear, anxiety and potential falls.
- Practice for 20 minutes or so, don't overdo it.
- Make practice fun and celebrate the accomplishments.
- Always end practice on a positive note (perhaps celebrating their ability to navigate a controlled stop, putting their feet down, dismounting and putting the kick stand down).
- Riding, braking and self-starting do not need to be textbook, just effective.

The overall goal for your rider is independence. Therefore, provide the least amount of support needed. Our instructions for spotting are designed to remove every small obstacle to reduce fear, anxiety and frustration for the rider. Breaking down each skill to a simple level while encouraging each success will motivate the rider to continue to give it their all while practicing. As the rider progresses, the spotter should be able to provide less and less assistance until spotting is no longer necessary.

Spotting <u>With</u> A Training Handle

- Hold the training handle firmly while your rider gets on and off the bike.
- While holding the handle, have the rider put both feet on the pedals and look forward (we suggest you give them a target to look at).
- Use simple, easy instructions and don't ask questions, make statements instead (e.g. "Feet on the pedals. Eyes forward. Here we go.").
- Before pushing off, make sure the bike is oriented perfectly straight up and down, perpendicular to the ground, not leaning to one side or the other. This allows the rider to be in an upright sitting posture and feel safe.
- Place one hand lightly guiding the end of the handle bars to enable keeping the direction straight with the other hand holding the training handle for stability.
- Guiding the front handle bar initially allows you to ensure a straight path for the bike and rider instead of going into an immediate turn.
- With an open palm on the training handle, use your palm to give a strong push as you increase speed along with the bike and rider.
- As soon as the bike is moving in a straight direction, let go of the handlebar first and then the training handle.
- It is imperative to provide a strong enough push that allows the rider to gain momentum and balance on the bike. If the rider does not have enough speed, they will likely fall over to one side.
- The most vital and courageous part of spotting is letting go of the training handle. This allows the rider to wobble and feel compelled to self-correct the wobble. This is precisely how they learn and eventually the wobble straightens out and the rider is in control.
- After you let go, continue to run to the side of the rider and training handle, just outside their line of vision, always within arms reach.
- The goal is for the spotter to be close enough to prevent a fall while touching and/or holding the training handle as <u>little as possible</u>.
- Never run directly behind the bike while spotting.
- Being behind the rider is not a good position in case your rider stops unexpectedly and it prevents you from reaching the rider's body to break a fall (wrapping your arm around their torso or under their arm). We want you to be safe as well as your rider.
- You may use your palm to assist or manipulate the handle to help prevent a fall or stop the bike if needed.
- Remember – don't grab or hold on to the handle! The extent to which you are touching and/or holding on to the handle you are interrupting the rider's balance and/or need to self-correct… that is…you

are doing the balancing for the rider and distorting the natural 'feel' of having to self-correct to ride independently.

- If the rider begins to lose speed and begins to weave side to side, give an open palm push with the training handle. Your rider will gain speed and the wobble will lessen. Horsepower and speed corrects wobbling because momentum is important to staying straight when learning to ride a bicycle.
- If a rider begins to fall, we recommend you grab the handle with your inside hand and wrap your outside arm across the rider's chest to catch them and/or break their fall.
- When stopping, have your rider put both feet on the ground as they should do every time. Remind the rider "feet on the ground."
- A fall or a near fall should be dealt with in a positive way and immediately. A fall may cause a sense of shock so you want to move on without dwelling too much.
- If a rider falls, give a quick check to make sure they are not seriously injured, and get right back on the bike!
- If a rider walks away from a fall, even to take a quick break, fear and anxiety begins to build and within moments getting back on the bike seems impossible to the rider.
- Even if a rider has a scraped knee and is crying, just a quick lap before stopping to get a Band-Aid makes getting back on the bike later so much easier. This concept is critical to a rider's continued success while learning to ride.

Spotting Without a Training Handle

- The same concepts of spotting with a training handle apply for spotting without a training handle.
- If a rider needs assistance starting or stopping, push or pull back on their seat.
- While riding, the rider's body can be manipulated to assist the rider.
- While running beside your rider, you may push or pull against their side to help them remain upright.
- If the rider needs more speed, you can push on the rider's back or on the seat.

Braking

At iCan Bike programs we recommend and teach use of hand brakes for stopping. For most riders, it is easier to differentiate between the two motor skills of 'feet make you go' and 'hands make you stop'. This does not mean that riders cannot successfully learn to use a coaster brake, in addition to the hand brake, at a future time.

Hand Brakes

- Help the rider move forward on the bike, then squeeze the hand brake so they feel the bike stop.
- Explain that when they squeeze the brake, the bike will stop and then they need to put both feet on the ground.
- So, first "squeeze" then "feet on the ground".
- Have the rider practice this by pedaling and when you say "stop" or "squeeze", they squeeze and put both feet on the ground while holding the bike and their body upright.

Coaster Brakes

- If your rider's bike does not have a handbrake, explain that in order to make the bike stop the rider needs to use the pedals.
- For this approach, finding the right wording to ensure the process makes sense to your rider is an important step for success.
- Some of the queues we use are "Pedal backwards", "Kick back.", and "Push back".
- Demonstrating what the skill "feels like" is very helpful as well. For example, a physical prompt of firmly pushing down on the area just above the knee works well for most individuals.
- If the above approach is not working another option is to practice coaster braking by getting off the bike.

- Stand beside the rider and explain "When we want to go forward, we walk forward. When we want to stop, we step backward, with one foot hard and quickly".
- Say "forward" as you walk forward with the rider. Then step back quickly and firmly with one foot while you say "backward".
- You can also try "go" while walking forward and "stop" as you step back with one foot. Repeat this a few times until the rider understands then return to the bike to practice.
- Let the rider get going on the bike as you run along beside them. After they are comfortably pedaling, initiate the verbal queue that you have established. Repeat as necessary.
- If the rider begins to get frustrated, just let them ride for a bit.
- ***Always end every practice session on a positive note.***

Self-Starting

Self-starting can be a very frustrating skill for many riders to learn. It may take a while for a rider to accomplish this skill. As with braking, if starting begins to cause frustration, and seems to be discouraging a rider from riding altogether, go back to giving them a push to get started and let them ride and practice stopping. Try self starting another time. This will build their confidence back up, motivating the rider to continue practicing.

When practicing starting, make sure you are on an even surface or, even better, a slight decline. Do not try to teach self-starting on inclines. At first, if your rider is not gaining enough speed from their start and/or not pedaling soon enough or fast enough to get going, they will likely need a little push. Give an open hand push on the training handle, the riders back or push from the seat. It's going to take time, so you want them to be successful and not get frustrated. So a "secret booster push" works well.

There are two main types of starting we teach. Both starts will likely be more successful if you are able to get on a bike and show the rider first. Be sure to wear a helmet!

Unless the rider already knows how to use the Power Start we typically teach the Frog Start during the iCan Bike program.

Frog Start

The Frog Start is easier for most riders because the position of the pedals does not matter, they have multiple chances to build up speed and their bike starts off straight up and down.

- Have the rider sit on the bike with both feet on the ground.
- Tell them they are going to push off the ground 3 times really hard (like a frog, both feet at the same time) and then put both feet on the pedals and pedal.
- It is helpful for you to count their 3 pushes with them and then say pedal.
- If 3 pushes are not giving the rider enough speed you may make the decision to say push 4 times or 5 times.

Power Start

This start does work better for some riders but for many it is difficult because the pedals have to be in the right position to begin. (It's certainly easier to get the pedals in the right position if the bike is geared because you can easily rotate the pedals into the needed position.)

- Have the rider walk the bike forward until one pedal is pushed slightly beyond its highest point from the ground.
- A good way to explain this to your rider is to say "make one pedal tall and one pedal small".
- The rider will put their foot on the tall pedal and the other foot on the ground.
- Two things must happen simultaneously. As the rider pushes down hard on the tall pedal, they must push off the ground with the other foot and then quickly put that foot on the pedal and begin pedaling.
- One modification that often helps with leverage and momentum is to have the rider's foot on a curb about 6" to 8" higher than the ground when executing this start method. This enables the rider's body weight to do more of the work and leg muscles to do less of the work.

These starts may be unique to the individual. If your rider is doing a different start, or combining these two starts in some way, support them to help their unique method of self-starting become effective. The only requirement for each skill is that it be effective. The skill need not be perfect, only perfect for your rider. We are all different in our abilities and in our styles. Encourage and celebrate the difference!

Additional Practice

A stationary bike, or a bike in a training stand, can also be a great way to practice:

- if a rider is still struggling with consistent pedaling.
- to practice braking.
- if extreme fear is preventing a rider from getting on a typical two-wheel bike. This will help create a positive association with bikes and then return to another iCan Bike camp.
- in the winter or when weather prevents outdoor bike riding to help create/maintain the muscle memory and build strength and endurance.

Below is an example of a stationary bike you can make at home. They make different sized training wheels for single speed bikes. Just make sure they match your bike's tire size and support your rider's weight.

For larger bikes, you can use regular bike trainers. These are usually made for cyclists to train in the winter and have mechanisms to provide resistance. You are working on muscle memory of pedaling and don't need to worry about the resistance. So look for inexpensive trainers. Thrift stores are a great place to find inexpensive trainers. If the trainer is made for a bike that's larger than the one you have, it will likely still work. Just put some wide wooden blocks (think 2x8) under the front tire to level the bike. These trainers look like this: