

Parent Guide



www.balanceability.com

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Get cycling - it's great fun!

Balanceability... the journey starts here

Most parents remember the moment when our children first learn to cycle, and there is no doubt that cycling is a key life skill. This booklet is designed for parents to accompany Balanceability sessions, to help you to share in the experience, and to help you cycle with your children.

Typically children learn to cycle at a younger age, and faster, with balance bikes than with bikes with stabilisers, because they learn to balance before they learn to pedal. The Balanceability programme also helps them learn key balance skills to develop their physical literacy.

This booklet and further information can be found on the Balanceability website

www.balanceability.com

Why we use Balance bikes

Basics of balance bike

Balanceability bikes are light (3.7kg) easily adjustable, and comfortable, with air filled tyres. Balance bikes are made so that it's easy to get on, sit on them and walk, this is how children learn to balance. Our bikes also have a rear brake and are durable enough to train lots of children.

To save parents the expense of buying their own Balance bike that may only be needed for a short time we equip schools, nurseries and leisure outlets with:

- **Balance bikes**
- **Helmets**
- **Balance Bags**
- **Manuals and resources**
- **Trained instructors**

Our course has been designed by sports coaches, early years teachers and cyclists, is accredited by the Physical Development Board for Education and Skills Active.

Safety

We recognise that most parents don't cycle with their children because of safety concerns. Balanceability instructors are taught to fit and adjust bike helmets, and the equipment packs include helmets. If you want to send your child with their own helmet we can help you make sure that its adjusted correctly. Balanceability sessions can be run inside or outside, our sessions expose the children to no greater risk than their everyday play activities at nursery or school. Learning to cycle is always done in a traffic free environment.



First steps

The accredited and structured programme can take children as young as 2½ (30 months) through a progressive series of outcomes. The sessions are filled with fun games and activities and step from balance to cycling freely.



Balance is important to achieving success in almost every sport or physical activity and is fundamental in the process of learning to ride a bike'. Its all about confidence.



First steps to learning to balance

Riding position



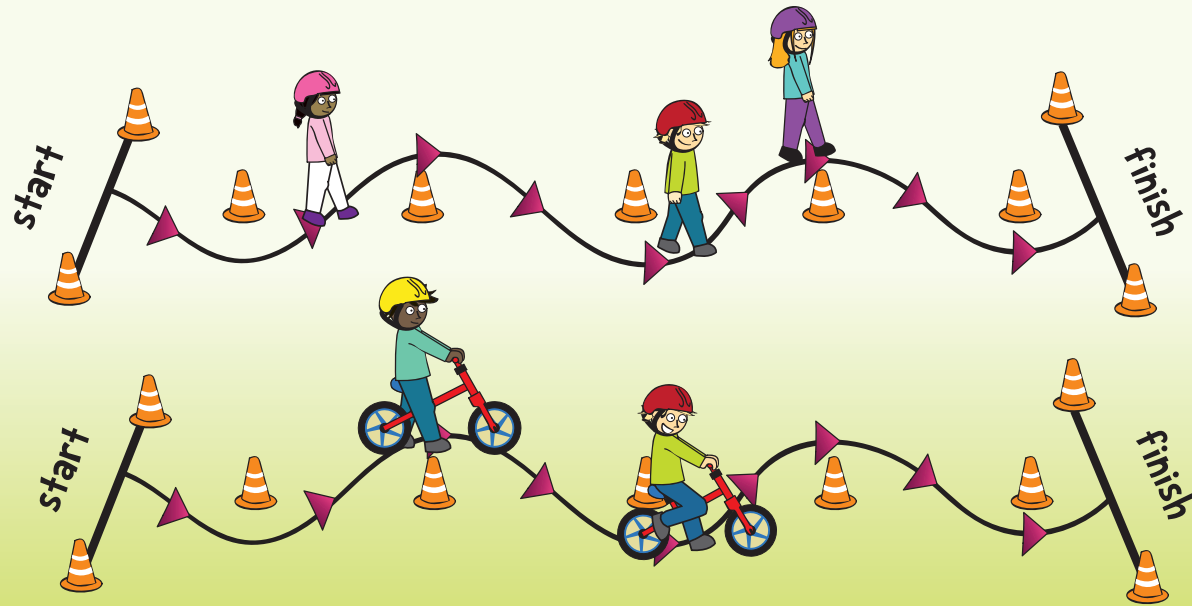
1. Feet on the floor
2. Slightly bent knees
3. Bottom firmly on the seat
4. Hold handlebars securely

Learning to balance



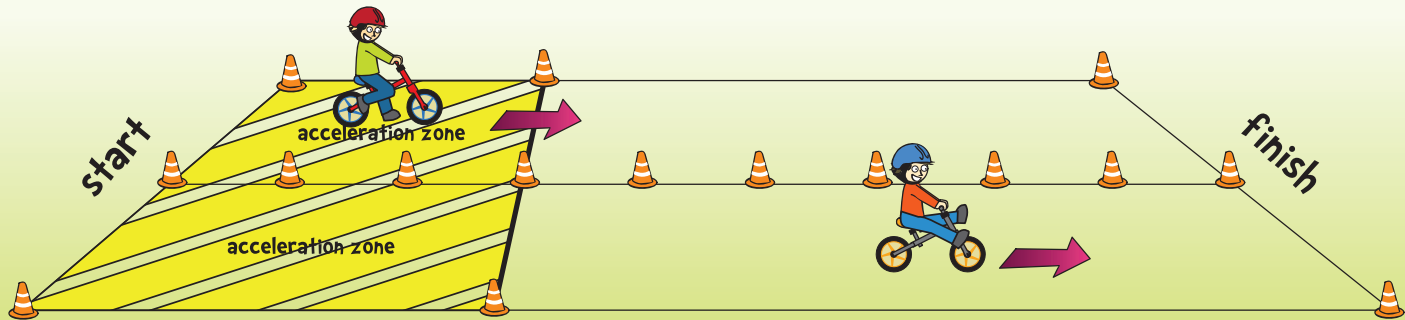
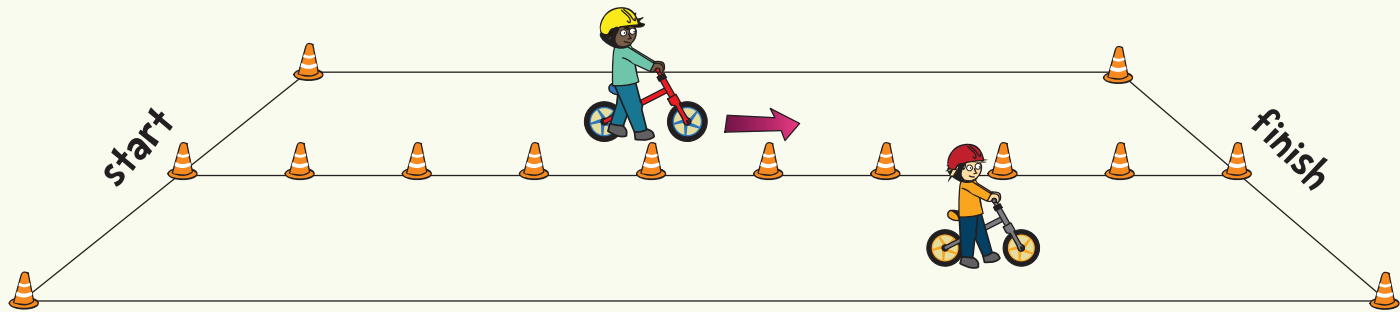
1. Start walking whilst remaining seated
2. Build confidence and take longer strides
3. Balance will develop with speed
4. Lift the feet and glide

Getting involved in sessions



Ask your Balanceability instructor what your child has learnt week by week, they should be able to show you which outcomes your child is developing, or has mastered.

You can ask to watch a session, and once your child can glide they might ask you to bring their own bike in so that they can progress to pedalling.



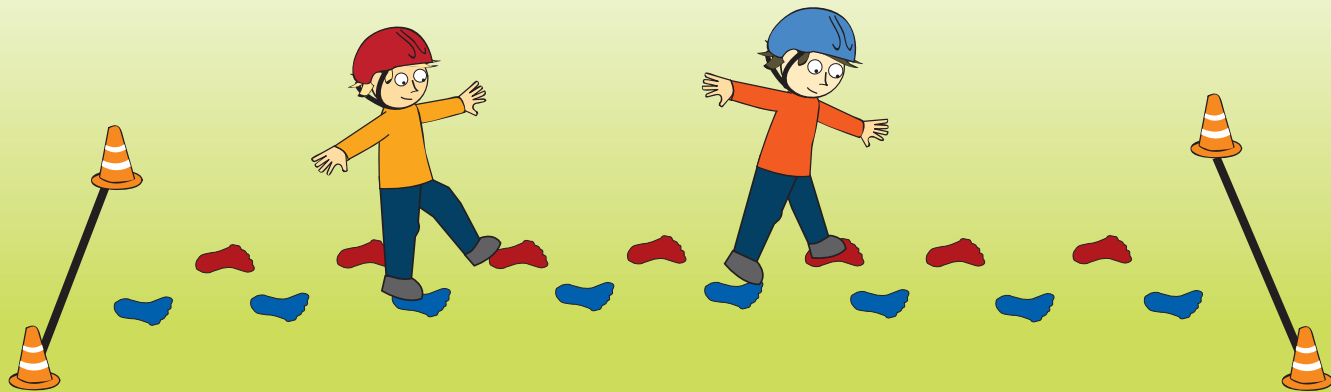
The structured sessions take children through walking on the bike to lifting their feet up and gliding.

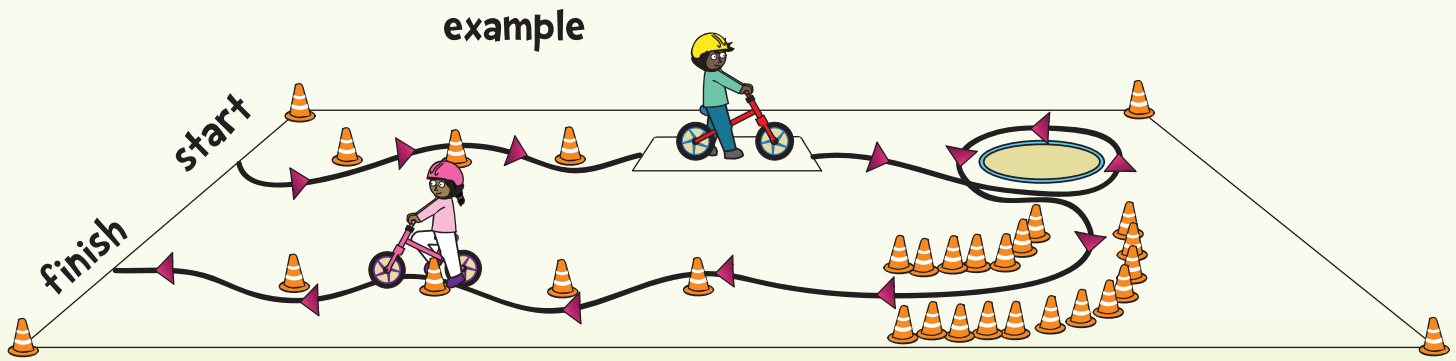
Helping your child learn Balanceability

At your local park, or playground, you can have a go at simple balance activities with your child. They should be able to show you what they have been learning, but you can:

- Jump, hop and run, and move in a variety of ways, it can be integrated into simple games
- Walk along a line pretending it's a tightrope
- Use steps and other things to balance on, practice stepping with alternate feet

If you have access to a balance bike they can show you what they have been learning. The local park or playground are good, although you can use any relatively flat traffic free space. It's best to avoid steep slopes when they are starting out. If you are going for a short walk, you could let them bike along with you on the path.





A key part of our programme is to help them take bigger steps on a balance bike and to gain the confidence and speed to lift their feet up. We also help them to learn to steer by including courses with turns, slaloms and obstacle courses. You can help them practice these skills. If you already cycle, then you can think about cycling with your child, they will gain a lot from being out with you on a bike, here are some ways to cycle with them:

- Fit a bike seat to your bike
- Use a cycle trailer
- Buy, borrow or hire a specially designed bike or trike
- Fit a tag-a-long bike to yours

Moving onto a pedal bike

Your Balanceability Instructor will tell you when your child is ready to progress to a pedal bike. If you don't have a bike then it may be possible to use one as part of the Balanceability programme.

Bike check: If you are using your child's own bike, it's good to have it checked at a local bike store, or you can follow the M check, you can find this online, for example: www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/migrated-pdfs/frk_bikemcheck.pdf

Your bike shop should also be able to tell you what size bike is most suitable for your child.

Stabilisers: If your child's bike has stabilisers on, it's best to take them off as soon as they have started gliding on a balance bike.

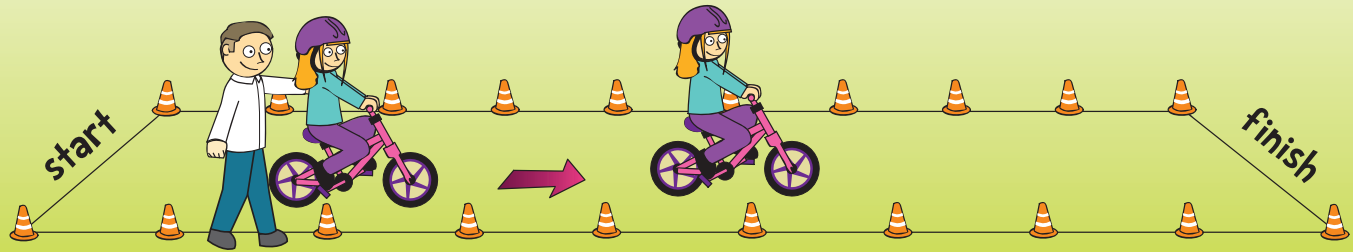
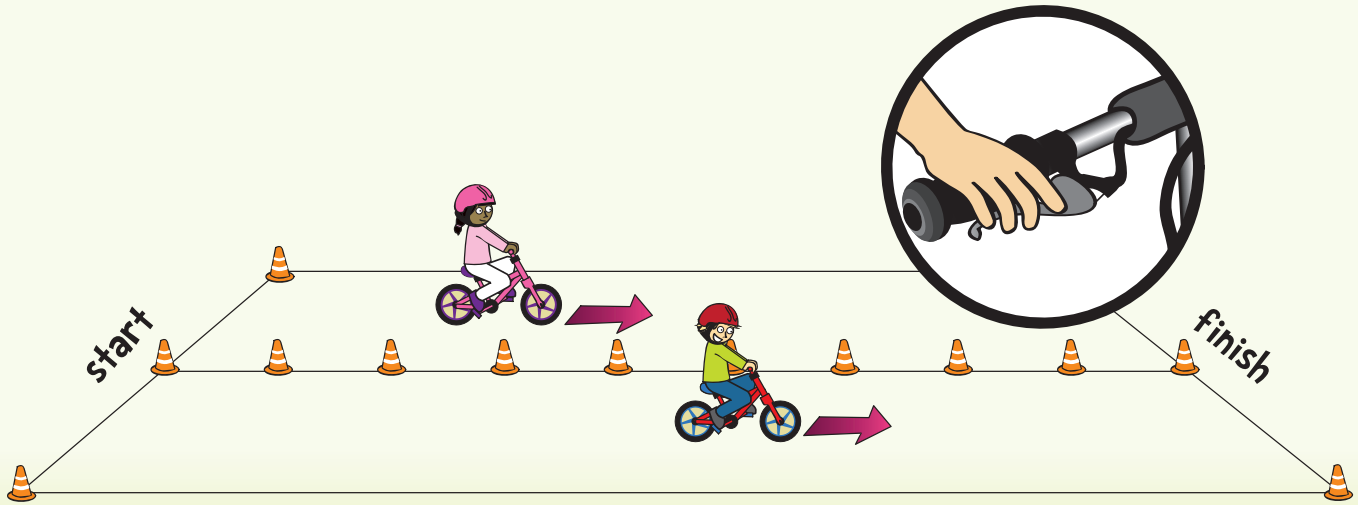
Seat Height: Start off with the seat height set lower than you would for cycling, ideally they should be able to get their feet flat on the ground. Once they are pedalling with confidence adjust it upwards in small increments. Optimum seat height for a confident cyclist is so that the leg is almost straight when the pedal is at its lowest point.

There is a seat height limit marked on your bike and don't adjust it higher than this point.

Brakes: It's worth going through the basics of stopping, we recommend teaching them to squeeze both brakes at the same time. Check that they can reach both levers, it is possible to adjust most brakes so that the lever can move closer to the handlebars.

Starting with pedals: Some people take the pedals off their child's bike to help them get used to gliding, if you do this, then fit the right pedal first. We teach children to get the right 'pedal ready' in the 2 o'clock position so that they are ready to set off.

Your child should already have the basics of balance and steering, but a pedal bike will feel different for them as it is heavier and has a different geometry. If they need you to support them try a light touch approach, often a little push on the back can help them get enough momentum to balance.



What next

When your child is learning to cycle you can take them and their bike on short walking trips, they are allowed to cycle on the pavement when they are learning, or you might take them on a walk around a local park.

As soon as they are pedalling with confidence you will probably need a bike to keep up with them. Traffic free cycle routes and tracks are ideal for shorter family cycle trips. You may be surprised how far they can cycle but try and stay within a couple of km of your base while you gain confidence in their ability. It's also a good idea to carry a basic toolkit, water and a few things with you (snacks, money and a small first aid kit) on a cycle trip, so a comfortable bag or cycle pannier is advisable.

Your local council or Sustrans should be able to help you with where you can find local traffic free routes and cycle tracks.

Once your child is pedalling with confidence you may want to try and get them some more training. Your local council should be able to tell you where you can access Bikeability Training (bikeability.org.uk), Cycle Experience (cycleexperience.com), the CTC (www.ctc.org.uk) or a local cycle club may be able to help (www.britishcycling.org.uk).

For more information about Balanceability please visit:
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the journey starts here...