

HOW TO BE:

A CYCLING FAMILY

EVERYDAY CYCLE-COMMUTING WITH KIDS



Want to use a bike for every-day travel, and need to transport small children too?

Getting to work or study can be complicated if you also need to drop children at nurseries and schools. With a bit of planning, cycling can be a practical, economic and enjoyable solution for your whole family's everyday travel needs.

This fact-sheet provides some practical ideas for parents needing to transport children who are too young to cycle independently to their own destinations, and various options that might apply as children grow. We cover...

- Child-carrying equipment for adult bikes: child seats, tag-alongs, tow-bars, trailers
- Some practical next steps
- Specialised people/load carrying bikes: cargo-bikes and tandems
- Further information

1 Child-Carrying Equipment for Adult Bikes

There are various equipment options that simply attach to your existing bike.

1.1

Child Seats

These are probably the most common means of transporting babies and pre-schoolers by bike.

- Easy to use and store
- Typically rear-mounted (put luggage in front panniers or a basket) though some are front-mounted.
- Suitable from when a child can sit comfortably (around 8 months), up to around 4 years, depending on weight.
- Always follow manufacturers' instructions. Make sure there is a good child harness; secure feet too.
- Ensure your bike is well-supported when parked; don't let the front wheel slip when loading the child. Make sure your brakes work well.
- Dress your child adequately - they won't be pedalling to keep warm.
- Get an inexpensive extra fixing set to swap the seat between other bikes.

1.2

Child Trailers

Typically, a two-wheeled canvas-covered trailer (various makes), towed behind the adult bike

- Usually space for 2 kids and /or some luggage, protected from the elements
- Usable for newborns upwards (may need extra fittings).
- Can often be used in combination with a child seat.

- The initial investment may be repaid with the potential for longer use, as well as for carrying other loads.

- Some trailers fold to make storage easier; some even convert into buggies!
- At night, ensure the trailer has lights and reflectors. Attach a tall flag for greater visibility.
- The low centre of gravity is good for balance. Practice cornering skills, given the longer length, and remember the extra width. Check your brakes are working well.

1.3

Tag-Alongs

(also known as Trailer Bikes; various makes)

A tag-along is a one-wheeled 'half bike' (saddle, handlebars and pedals) that is towed behind an adult bike.

- Typically suitable for 4 - 9 year olds

(from when your child can sit on a bike saddle competently).

- The child can pedal to help out, or freewheel if tired.
- Easily detachable, to leave at school during the day, and for storage at home (some fold up).
- Carry luggage in rear or front panniers, or use rucksacks.
- Take extra care when turning, given the extra length, and ensure brakes are working well.
- Get used to the tag-along first before adding your passenger.
- Improve visibility for you and your child by wearing bright or reflective clothing. Fit a rear light and reflector for night-cycling.
- Get an additional hitch to swap the tag-along between bikes.



Images (clockwise from top right):

Tag-along (credit: W Ivory)

Bike with Child Seat (credit: K Ivory)

Kids in trailer (credit: G Husband / bretonbikes.com)

Bike with Trailer and Child Seat (credit: S Dorman)



Images (clockwise from bottom left):

Bakfiets (credit: London Cycling Campaign)

Tow-Bar (credit: A Bird)

Kangaroo Bike (credit: kangarobike.com)

Folding (Brompton) Bike (credit: W Ivory)



**1.4
Tow-bars**

These special fittings attach your child's own bike rigidly to yours – e.g. the Trail-gator www.trail-gator.com and the FollowMe www.followme-tandem.com

- The child can switch between being towed (pedalling or not) and riding independently.
- Makes use of your child's existing bike; less equipment to store.
- Some fittings allow a child-seat to be used at the same time too.
- As with anything towed, take care with speed bumps and sharp turns.

**2.2
Tandems (for 1 or more passengers)**

Tandems are good for kids big enough to sit on a saddle and hold onto handlebars.

- More stable than a tag-along, and good for covering significant distances.
- Kids participate in pedalling but can slacken off if tired.
- Practise to get used to the length of the bike, especially round corners. Your child must be able to follow your instructions about pedalling.
- Fairly expensive, and consider storage needs – but potential for lots of use.
- 'Kiddie cranks' and crank-adaptors can help for smaller children, or choose a 'child-back' model.

- Potential to attach a trailer or tag-along behind for another child too.
- Some models (e.g., the Circe Helios –see photo on front page) are designed specifically for child- /load- carrying, easily adaptable for a variety of situations – e.g. an adult with two child-seats, or an adult with a child and a child-seat too.

**2
Specialised People/Load Carrying Bikes**

**2.1
Cargo Bikes**

In countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands, cargo bikes are commonly used for carrying kids.

- Typically these are trikes, with 2 wheels at the front and a large open or covered box for children / luggage - e.g., the Christiana www.christianabikes.com and the Kangaroo www.kangarobike.com
- The 'Bakfiets' bike is two-wheeled.
- Sociable travelling (easy to chat), and easily visible in traffic
- Given the extra bulk of such bikes, consider ease of cycling for your regular routes, and storage needs.
- Whilst high, the initial investment could result in a great deal of enjoyable family transport.
- New buggy-conversion bikes are also available – e.g. the Taga www.tagabikes.com

**3
Next Steps**

**3.1
Give it a go!**

- Ask for a test-run, if someone you know has the equipment you're interested in. As with anything new, practise first before doing it 'for real' – at weekends / on quieter roads, without your child first, then with.
- For all equipment, check suitability for your bike with a reputable dealer before buying anything.

– If you're new to cycling yourself, build your confidence with some cycle training (see the information box below).

– THINK SAFETY. Keep equipment well-maintained; if you use helmets, make sure they are fitted correctly; and choose the right bike seat, trailer or bike for the age and abilities of your child.

– Make sure that all clothing, and feet / footwear, are secure – you don't want anything getting caught in the rear wheel. See www.rospa.com for further safety advice.

– There is added safety in numbers: maybe there's scope to travel together with other local families heading the same way?

– Even if child-carriage by bike is not for you, consider using two wheels for part of your own journeys, in combination with walking / scooting and buses/trains. Compact folding bikes (such as Bromptons) provide lots of flexibility, especially as they can be taken on public transport.

**3.2
Route Planning**

A key step in planning family cycle-commuting is identifying the best routes. Obviously you'll want to avoid busy main roads and steep hills.

– The Spokes Edinburgh Cycle map (and similar for East, Mid and West Lothian, and Glasgow) marks roads and paths for their cycling suitability, with cut-throughs etc too. Available from good bike shops or direct from Spokes.

– Edinburgh Council produces a range of map-leaflets useful for families – Explore Edinburgh by Bike (area by area) and also Explore Edinburgh Car-free maps. Download from: www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cycling



Explore Edinburgh by Bike is also available from Clarence: 0800 232323 / clarence@edinburgh.gov.uk

3.3 Sources of Equipment and Storage

- Edinburgh has a number of bike shops that stock child-carrying equipment.
- See web links to local and some national suppliers on Spokes website.
- Nearly New Sales and school bike sales, as well as e-Bay and Gumtree, can be good sources of tag-alongs, trailers and child bikes.
- The Bike Station, Edinburgh's bicycle recycling and cycling promotion charity, sells quality re-conditioned bikes of all types (adult and child). www.thebikestation.org.uk
- If space at home is an issue, the Spokes Bike Storage project has produced a factsheet which might provide ideas, see www.spokes.org.uk (Go to downloads → Technical → Spokes storage project)
- If there isn't already bike parking at your child's school or nursery, speak to the management. Could you leave equipment such as tag-alongs, trailers and child bikes

somewhere during the day? The Council's School Travel Coordinator might be able to help too.

3.4 Developing the Cyclists of the Future

- As your child grows up, hopefully they'll become regular cyclists in their own right.
- For very young children 'Balance bikes' without pedals (either sold as such, or just remove pedals from a small bike) are great for developing balance. Scooter use can also help.
- Once your child is at school, speak to your child's school about training. Ready Steady Bike (control skills) starts from P4 and Scottish Cycle Training Scheme road-cycling skills from P6/7, followed by 'Go By Cycle'. Contact your local Active Schools Co-ordinator via your school.

Images (from top):

Spokes Maps for Glasgow and Edinburgh
Pedal-less Bike (credit: K Ivory)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Spokes campaign to encourage more families to cycle continues to develop. The equipment options for child-carrying bikes and cycling equipment are developing constantly so if you have good suggestions or feedback from your experiences, please send them in! Email familycycling@spokes.org.uk

For added inspiration, we've put together some case studies based on the actual experiences of people living and working in Edinburgh who use bikes on an every-day basis to get to their jobs, schools and nurseries. Available with the extended factsheet on the Spokes website (go to Advice – Commuting-with-kids).

Other useful sources of information on family cycling/commuting...

www.rospa.com

RoSPA: safety advice - Carrying Children on Bicycles.

www.lcc.org.uk

London Cycle Campaign: leaflet on 'Cycling with Children', and 'Learning to Ride for School & Leisure'.

www.ctc.org.uk

CTC: the UK's national cyclists' organisation. 'Guide to Family Cycling' and 'Women on Wheels'.

www.sustrans.org.uk

Sustrans: 'Cycling with Children' leaflet, and 'Get Cycling - a Guide to choosing and using your bike'.

Want to cycle more, and looking for information?

www.spokes.org.uk

Spokes campaigns for better conditions for using a bike for your everyday work and leisure journeys. Spokes also produces highly-regarded cycle maps for Edinburgh and the Lothians, as well as running Sunday rides and an informative website.

www.thebikestation.org.uk

Edinburgh's bicycle recycling charity. Quality re-conditioned bikes at good prices.

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cycling

Council cycling information, local cycling maps, other useful weblinks / organisations.

www.citycyclingedinburgh.org

Cycling discussion forums, info