

4. Pushing your cycle and balancing

National Standard reference: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.2.1

Instructing points

Push a cycle

- Walk with your cycle, giving yourself enough space to not bump into it.
- Keep your fingers covering the brakes and stop the cycle using both brakes.
- Make turns when pushing your cycle by using the steering.

Get on and off

- Get on and off from both sides of your cycle.
- Understand the advantage of getting on and off from the left in the UK.
- Pull your brakes before getting on or off the cycle, or when stationary.
- Lean your cycle towards you to lower the saddle (if required).
- Put your leg over the saddle or step through the cycle (if appropriate) when getting on or off.
- Keep at least one foot on the ground when stationary or when getting on or off.

Balance and glide

- Look and turn your head in the direction you want to go.
- Sit with a straight back to avoid leaning to the side.
- Push along with both feet alternately (stride) to create enough speed to glide.
- Steer into the direction you feel the cycle is leaning to put the cycle back under yourself.
- Use your brakes to slow down or stop.

Activity ideas

Check the riders' cycles and ensure they fit them. They should be comfortable and stable when sitting on the saddle when their feet are on the ground. When teaching someone to balance and glide, start with a lower saddle than normal as this will help them to start by scooting with their feet and gliding. Raise their saddle as they get more skilled.

Push a cycle

Start by getting riders to practise pushing their cycles. Demonstrate this first, pushing the cycle with your fingers covering the brakes. Brake gently to slow down and to stop, showing that you are avoiding 'snatching' the brakes or lurching forward. Walk and turn by using the handlebars rather than leaning the cycle or lifting it. Ask the riders to then practise this. For groups, consider a 'follow the leader' exercise where riders practise walking their cycles and stopping from time to time. You could also use coloured cones and ask riders to walk to, and around, a particular cone.

Activity ideas (continued)

Get on and off

Demonstrate how to get on and off, asking riders to observe your technique. See if they can offer the instructing points themselves as you demonstrate. For group sessions, ensure the riders have enough space between them and then ask them to practise getting on and off. Practise this on both sides and consider if you need to emphasise the left side (for the UK).

Balance and glide

You should not need to have any physical contact with riders or their cycles when teaching them to balance and glide; this should be a skill they develop naturally.

First consider playing a balance game: ask riders to lift one foot off the ground when they are seated on the saddle. Then switch feet. Then, ask them to bring both their feet out wide, and then close together. They will see how keeping their feet wide will help with balance (this will also be helpful for when pushing along later). Then ask them how long they can lift both feet off the ground at the same time when stationary. See if they can do this for one or two seconds.

After this, you can start balance bike-style activities where the riders push along with their feet and glide. Demonstrate this first, showing both 'giraffe' steps (pushing with one foot at a time) or 'kangaroo' steps (pushing with both feet at the same time). This is a good moment to explain key coaching points for learning balance:

- Look in the direction that you want to go.
- Sit up straight.
- Push off hard so you can glide as far as possible.
- Lift your feet up for as long as possible.
- Cover your brakes!

Use circuits that enable the riders to practise lifting their feet off the ground for as long as possible. Using a smooth, flat training area will help riders progress. Also consider using a gentle slope. You could do a game where riders have to try to cross an imaginary river without getting their feet wet. Make the space wider as they manage to glide for longer.

Consider snaking-based activities where each rider has the chance to be the 'leader'. For mixed-ability groups, consider allowing riders to overtake each other provided they give enough space. Ensure that the riders experience regular changes in direction. Once the riders can scoot and glide for a few metres in a straight line, they will have learnt the basics of how to balance! As they progress, they can practise stopping with their feet off the ground, keeping their brakes on after stopping.

Sample questions to check understanding

- Q. Where should your fingers and thumbs be? How hard do you need to grip?
- Q. Where should you look to help your balance?
- Q. Why is it important that you stay sitting down (on the cycle)?

Differentiation

Inclusion

Some riders will need more time to learn than others. They may start with walking with the cycle underneath them at first. Support them by sharing the key coaching points and be mindful that all riders progress at their own pace. Riders for whom English is not their first language will also need clear demonstrations.

Some riders will use a cycle that does not require them to balance. These riders can advance straight on to the next activities. If you are working with a mixed group, you can include riders on non-standard cycles in the games, and focus on the other skills listed.

Extension

Simplify

Demonstrate the activity one to one with a rider who needs more support or ask them to watch a friend who can already do it. Give them one instructing point to focus on and practice.

Challenge

Carry out dynamic snaking-based games where groups of riders can snake around at higher speeds while practising lifting their feet up for longer distances each time.

Risk benefit assessment

Risk

- Two riders who are learning collide with each other when travelling in opposite directions.
- If scooting on a pedal cycle, a rider bangs their shins with the pedal while scooting along.
- Riders become tired and lose concentration.

Mitigation

- Ensure the riders travel in the same direction to avoid collisions. Use cones to mark the space clearly.
- Ensure riders are aware of where their pedals are while pushing and striding. Consider removing the pedals.
- Plan a session which is a suitable length, and is not beyond your riders' physical capabilities.

Benefits

Riders learn to balance at a rider-led pace and without unnecessary incidents.