

**A Primer for Bicycle Education Events:**

Useful Information to Know When Planning a Bicycle Safety Program

May 23, 2010

1. When we talk about a “bicycle education event”, we are referring to a “bicycle safety event”, "bike derby" or "bike rodeo", which are the same, and serve to educate children age 5-12 about bicycle riding for fitness, environment and transportation.
2. A successful bicycle education event is the result of coordination between many: your community group, your schools, your local police/fire departments, rescue squad, your local bike shop and a certified league cycling instructor (LCI).
3. Activities at a bicycle education event:
  - (i) Bicycle Mechanical Check: Mechanic/LCI checks bikes to have working brakes, properly inflated tires, and all other VERY important mechanicals to be properly set-up. The seat height is set so that the child can get full leg extension while pedaling, or slightly lower so that an inexperienced rider can develop balance and confidence. (Time: 5-10 minutes per child/bike)
  - (ii) Helmet Check: LCI or trained volunteer checks if the child has an effective/working helmet (no damage, less than three years old). If the child does not have a helmet, or has one that is the wrong size, she/he will have a proper one provided to use and take home. The helmet is then "fitted", where the straps are adjusted to keep the helmet in position in the event of a crash. Ideally all helmets should have an "occipital" support at the rear. The child is taught how to wear the helmet so that it is effective (not too far back on the head = 1" above eyebrows) and comfortable. At the helmet station, an LCI espouses the legal requirements, and benefits/drawbacks to parents and that the children must wear helmets at all times while at the event. (Time 5-10 minutes per child)
  - (iii) Skills Course: LCI or trained volunteer sets up a practice course using half-tennis balls or small cones. The child will ride through the course at the direction of the instructor to practice basic skills: starting/stopping, emergency stopping, slalom, scanning, figure 8, intersections, bike handling. Skills can be modified by the LCI to challenge all ages from 3 to adult (Time: 5-10 minutes per child)
  - (iv) Traffic Lesson: LCI talks about traffic flow and how cyclists should ride legally, i.e. stopping at stop signs, respecting one-way streets, avoiding parked car doors, being visible to other vehicles and dangers of riding on the sidewalk. (Time: 15 minutes per group)
  - (v) Group Ride: Following the traffic lesson, the LCI, police officers and adult volunteers can take qualified children (usually age 10 and up) who pass the skills course, on a group ride on streets open to traffic. This is always a meaningful experience, where children can practice the lessons taught by the LCI. Traffic laws should be reinforced

4. Frequency of events: It may be better to have regular, moderately sized events, than to have one large event or too many small events. I believe that a monthly bicycle program, would generate repeat "customers", and would reinforce and build on itself in popularity as the summer progresses. At a one-time program last year, children were excited, but somewhat ill-prepared, many with no bikes, no helmets, and/or NO brakes!
5. Event real-estate: Events require some large open, smooth space for the activities described above. Surface should be pavement or grass (no gravel, broken glass) On the small end, this can be a basketball/tennis court. On the large end, this can be a parking lot.
6. I will not let a child participate at an event without a helmet, or with a mechanically unsafe bike (that cannot be repaired by the mechanic on-site), i.e. again NO brakes=NO riding! (they can borrow a friend's bike)
7. As a rule-of-thumb, I will advise against children under age 10 riding on streets open to motor vehicle traffic. After assessing individual awareness and skills, I usually adjust this requirement up or down independently of age.
8. Staffing: For a small derby (fewer than 20 children), I would recommend to have the following staff.
  - (i) At least one (1) instructor on-site who is a League Cycling Instructor (LCI), certified by League of American Bicyclists (LAB). The LCI will coordinate all the activities. LCIs carry liability insurance through the LAB. ([www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org) has more info)
  - (ii) At least one (1) mechanic (with tools), who may or may not be LCI above, may be from a local bike shop, or may be a skilled community member. If the mechanic is the same LCI, I suggest two volunteers below.
  - (iii) At least one (1) volunteer to assist with the helmet check and skills course. Should be over 16 years old. No experience required – can be trained by the LCI at the event.
9. For a medium derby (20-50 children), multiply the above staffing by a factor of TWO, and for a large derby (50-100 children), multiply by a factor of THREE. This is a rough guideline and will depend on the ages of the children, condition of their bikes, and the condition/existence of their helmets.
10. The above staffing will be of best service if the children arrive at a distributed rate, i.e. not all at once. Based on the times in item 1 (above), the staffing can handle about 10-20 children per hour, so the overall duration of the event should be adjusted accordingly.

11. Parents: We all know that what is taught at home has a large influence on the development of a child. If a parent accompanies a child to a derby, the parent can be educated with the child, so that the parent will be aware of the important items described in item 1, and can further reinforce bicycle safety at home. Parents should be encouraged to attend!
12. Promotion: It is a great idea to promote the event in school, with flyers to take home, flyers around the neighborhood and information on community calendars, newsletters and websites. Promotion is most effective at least one month in advance and leading up to the event.
13. Paperwork: Important docs to have for event day
  - a. Waivers (releasing LCIs, organizers, property owner)
  - b. Sign-in sheet for children
  - c. Sign-in sheet for volunteers, LCIs
  - d. Handlebar tags with checklist of all stations
  - e. Certificates (“Be a Safety Bug” or similar) to reinforce and congratulate the young drivers. On back side should be safety info for parents to read.
  - f. Schedule of Events to post or hand out at registration
  - g. State Bicycle Drivers Manuals
14. Large signs for all stations: registration, helmets, mechanic, skills course
15. Have an event day photographer to take as many photos as possible of everyone having a good time and honing bike safety skills.
16. Not just for children: When we educate adults about effective cycling, we start with the very same fundamentals as above described for a 5-12 year old. Progression of these skills then leads into on-road situations that enable teenagers and adults to navigate more complex traffic environments.
17. Refreshments and snacks for volunteers. Have a large jug of water and tell volunteers to bring a refillable water bottle. Also have snacks to boost morale: bananas, apples, raisins, celery...
18. CAT can coordinate: If you have specific needs to customize your event; are looking for assistance to plan your event, and to staff the event, contact CAT-Coalition for Appropriate Transportation. CAT organizes numerous bicycle events around the Lehigh Valley. *The services of an certified instructor (LCI) working through CAT are available at the following rates:*
  - a. Initial meeting/consultation: No charge
  - b. Additional planning meetings/emails/phone calls: \$40 per hour
  - c. Event day coordination \$40 per hour
  - d. Host your event at CAT’s facility (the BBC) contact CAT

These fees support CAT (50%) and the instructor (50%), as CAT currently has no federal or state funding. Instructors may choose to adjust or waive these fees based on specific circumstances, i.e. for good karma.

19. I recommend that you look for underwriting (local business sponsorship, grants, etc.) to pay for the real costs of an event (helmets, instructor time, advertising). This will make the whole process sustainable for everyone.
20. The BBC: Bring your group to us. CAT's facility (Bethlehem Bicycle Cooperative) can host a bicycle education event for your group. We have a full workshop with workbenches, tools, classroom area, and a permanently traffic free Skills Course. The BBC is located in downtown Bethlehem, which provides convenient and interesting traffic skills practice.

**Thank You for your time and for reading this. Please provide feedback, concerns and criticisms openly via email or phone.**



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Scott Slingerland, League Cycling Instructor  
Car Free CAT - Coalition for Appropriate Transportation  
Mobile: 845-430-6552  
Email: [scott@car-free.org](mailto:scott@car-free.org)