

The Family Cycling Handbook: Peel Region Edition

**Everything you need to
know about family cycling in
Mississauga, Brampton, and
Caledon**

First edition, 2020



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Join thousands of people in Peel Region who ride bicycles because it's convenient, healthy, affordable and fun.

This handbook will teach you about family cycling, from pregnancy through grade 8. When riding your bikes, always remember to use your best judgement, take your time and have fun! For the original handbook, go to walkandrollpeel.ca/cycling/handbook.htm

The Family Cycling Handbook:
Peel Region Edition, First Edition.
Text: Sam Perry, Sarah Bradley
Illustrations and design: Jay Darr
This handbook was adapted from The Toronto Cyclists Handbook, which was first published in 2010 by Cycle Toronto, in partnership with CultureLink and with the support of the Toronto Foundation. The second edition was published in 2016.

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/// Reasons to ride as a family

Healthy

Get active together! Daily physical activity has proven benefits for the physical and mental well-being of kids (not to mention you!). Kids need 60 minutes of energetic activity every day.

Green

Go green as a family! Contribute to cleaner air and less-crowded streets by taking your bikes instead of a car or bus. Help your kids develop their lifelong sense of stewardship for planet earth.

Affordable

Owning and operating a bicycle or even a cargo bike is a fraction of the cost of a car or transit. Once your family owns bikes, they are free to operate!

Fun

Biking together means exploring neighbourhoods, parks, trails and the waterfront. Enjoy the fresh air, smells, sights and sounds.

Convenient

A bicycle is often faster than public transit or sitting in traffic. You can go where you want, when you want, as soon as you hop on. A bike is also a great way for kids to travel independently.

Safe

A growing network of bike lanes, cycle tracks, trails and quiet streets makes cycling increasingly safe and enjoyable for the whole family.

Connected

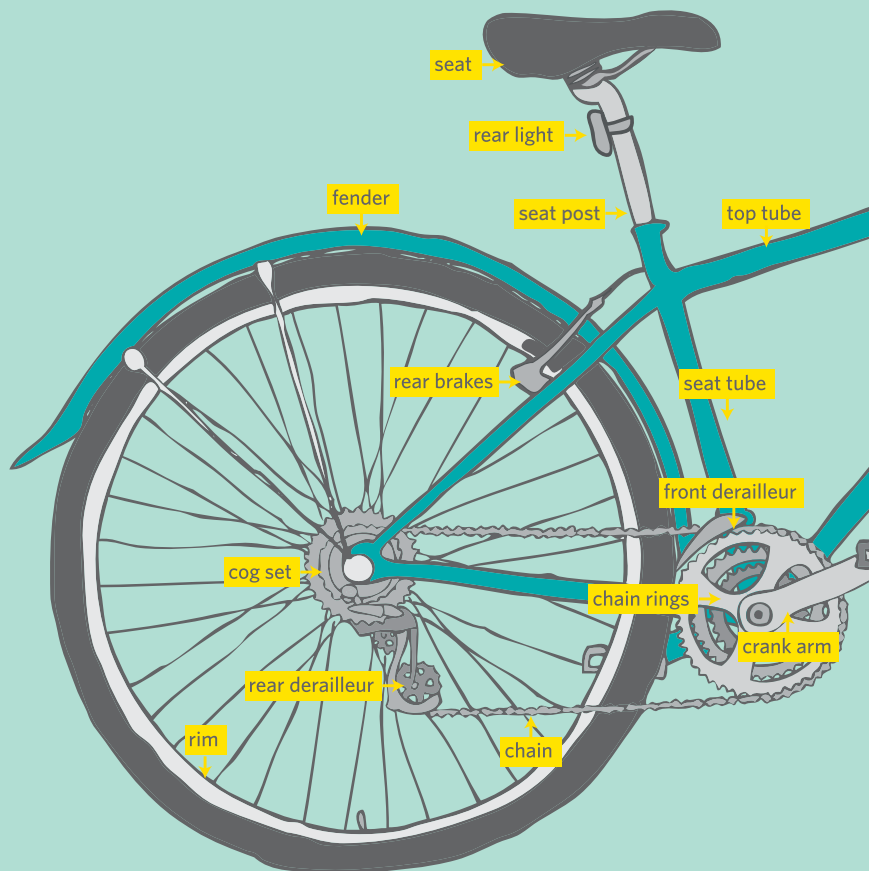
Get to know other families in your neighbourhood. Why not start a Bike Train or a Walk 'n' Roll Parade to school?



Choosing routes which were mostly on bike lanes, bike trails and quiet streets helped build comfort and confidence.

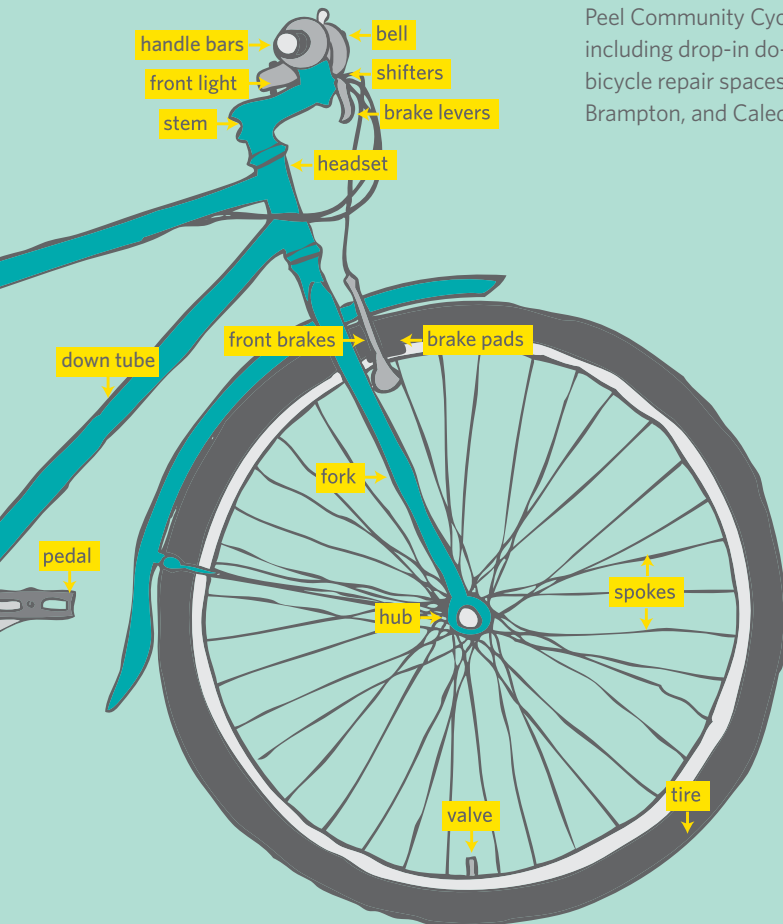
Our daughter was incredibly stalwart—I remember her yelling with glee as we cycled through a minor blizzard. She felt unstoppable, fearless and strong. ”

/// The bicycle





You can learn to fix your own bike at drop-in community bicycle work spaces, located across Peel Region. Check out www.walkandrollpeel.ca/projects to learn about the Peel Community Cycling Program, including drop-in do-it-yourself bicycle repair spaces in Mississauga, Brampton, and Caledon.



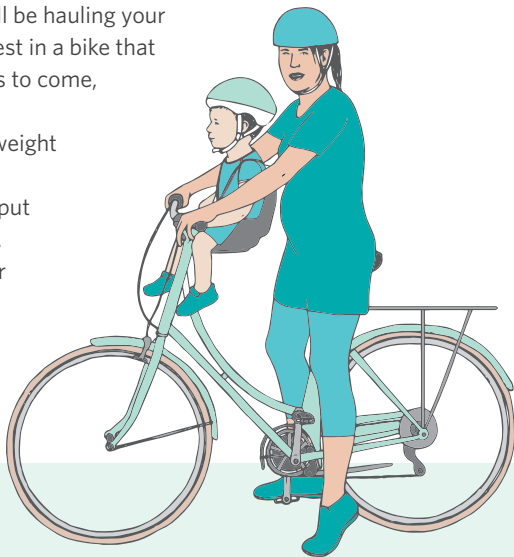
/// Biking while pregnant

Yes, you can bike while pregnant!

Many women bike while pregnant. Pedalling is a good way to get low-impact activity and, in later pregnancy when it's harder to walk, biking gets you around easily. Everyone's experience is different, so find what works for you. Go slowly, take quiet streets, and enjoy the view.

Tips:

- Upright, step-through bikes are best: they're easy to mount, comfortable, and spacious for pregnant bellies.
- Think about the future: you'll be hauling your little one up to age 5, so invest in a bike that will suit your needs for years to come, like a long-tail (see cover).
- Baskets and panniers keep weight off your back.
- Lower your seat so you can put your feet down comfortably.
- Protect your wrists: consider investing in handlebar grips that reduce the pressure.



“

Biking was a fantastic way to get around the city while pregnant. I biked right up to the day I went into labour. It was much easier on my body than walking and more energizing.”

/// Biking with babies & toddlers (age 0-4)

Support, safety, and snacks

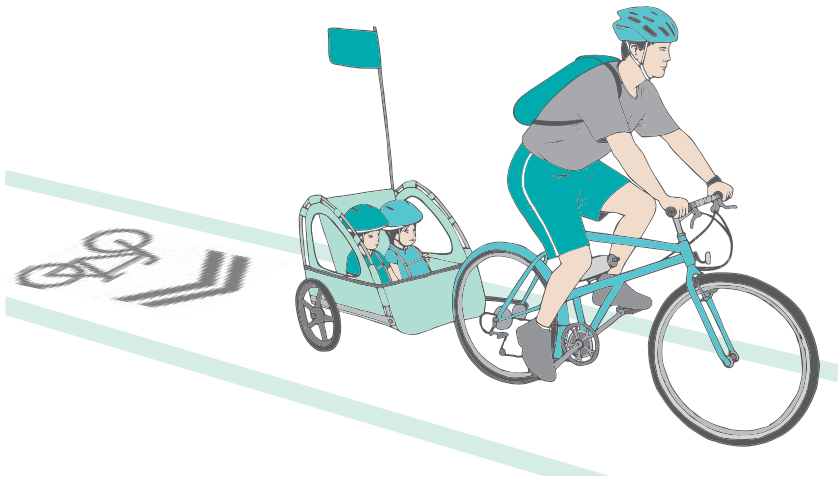
Biking with your baby is a lovely way to introduce them to life on two wheels. Always consult your child's pediatrician first, and be sure to fully support their head and neck using a "car" seat in a...

- **Trailer:** one- or two-child versions... also great for hauling groceries!
- **Cargo bike:** large bike with a cargo bay... take the whole neighbourhood for a ride!

Once your little one has developed neck strength, you can transition to the toddler setup:

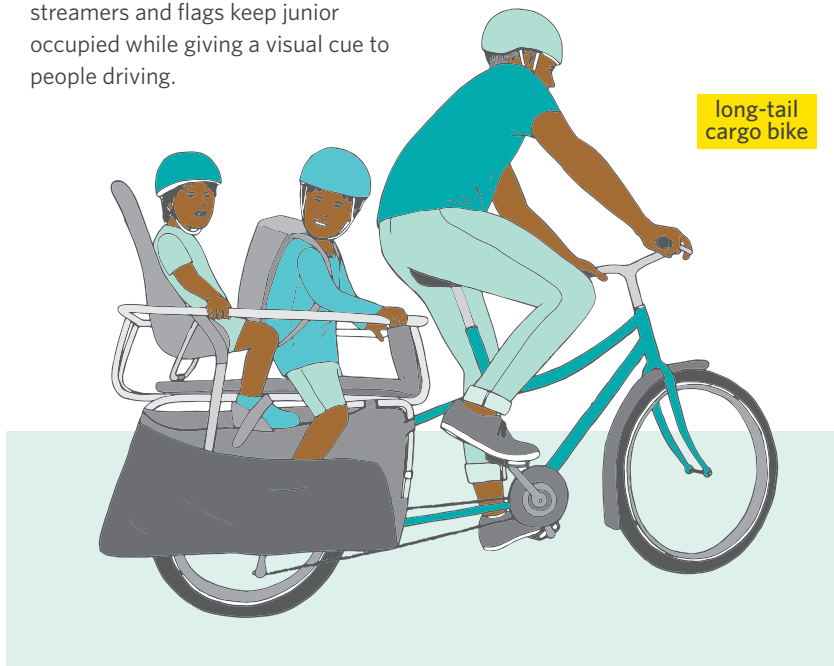
- **Front child seat:** mounted near the handlebars... child has a great view of the world!
- **Rear frame seat:** mounted to the frame in the rear
- **Rear rack seat:** mounted on a rear rack... these seats run bigger, so they're great for older toddlers.

bike with
trailer



Consider

- **Helmet:** safety first and required by law for people 17 and under.
- **Space:** rear bike seats need extra space, so skip the backpack and invest in panniers.
- **Balance:** child seats make your bike more top-heavy. Ride with extra caution and invest in a stable kick stand.
- **Visibility:** remember that you need a front light and a rear light or reflector if riding after sunset. Fun items like streamers and flags keep junior occupied while giving a visual cue to people driving.
- **Fit:** make sure the child seat fits your bike! You don't want your heels to hit the seat as you pedal.
- **The bike minivan:** long-tail bikes can accommodate two rear child seats and one front child seat, plus pull a trailer.
- **Get a boost:** if you're riding with your child using a rear trailer or cargo bike, consider an e-assist bike to carry the extra weight of growing kids.



/// Learning to ride (age 3-7)

Find the balance

Biking with your young child opens up exciting possibilities! Of course, you can still chauffeur them the same ways you did as a toddler: front or rear seats, trailers, or cargo bikes.

As your child grows out of their seat and becomes ready to learn to ride on their own, you want to help them build their skills gradually. The first goal is balance. Rather than a tricycle or training wheels, use a balance bike, a two-wheeled bike without pedals that your child pushes with their feet. A balance bike helps your child learn gliding, stopping, and starting. (Tip: create your own balance bike by simply removing the pedals from a regular child's bike!)

Once your child has mastered the basics, it's time to start practicing the next skill: pedalling on a two-wheeled bike. Make sure their feet can touch the ground when they're sitting, so

there's less chance of falling. Find a flat or slightly downward-sloping area to practice. When they're ready to try, remind them:

"Keep your handlebars as straight as you can."

"Push with your feet to get some speed."

"Lift your feet onto the pedals and glide."

"When you're ready, try pedalling."

When you're riding around town with your little learner, they can practice their riding skills in a supported way using some special gear:

- **Trailer bike:** a bike-like trailer, complete with seat, pedals, and handlebars, that gives your child the feeling of riding on their own (but you're still in control).
- **Tow bar:** a bar that attaches a regular child's bike to the back of an adult bike, creating an experience similar to a trailer bike.

Tips

- **Helmet:** still a must.
- **Bell or horn:** also a must for kids.
- **Lights:** you can never be too visible while biking.
- **Extras:** flags, streamers, and balloons increase visibility and add fun.

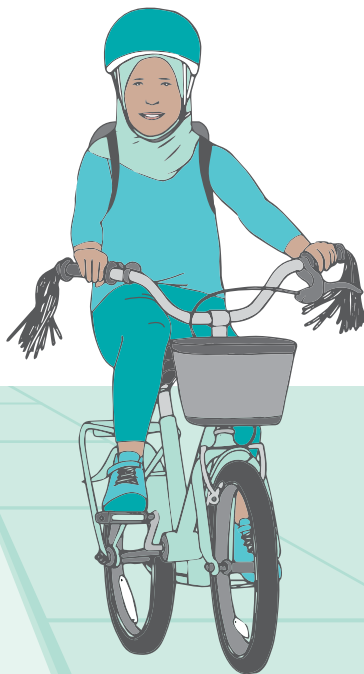
- **Sidewalks:** your child can ride on the sidewalk until they have a bicycle with wheels 20 inches (50 cm) in diameter or larger. Once your child grows into a bike this size, around age 10, they should learn the skills to ride on quiet streets.

/// Learning to ride to school (age 5-10)

Taking quiet routes to build confidence

Biking to school is the best! This is where your little one gets their first taste of transportation independence. Children riding bicycles with wheels less than 20 inches (50 cm) can ride on sidewalks and you can walk alongside your child. You can also plan routes through parks and trails for a low-stress ride. Always yield to people travelling more slowly than you. You'll want to help your child learn to pedal and use their coaster (foot) brakes as they begin to ride faster. Consider getting a group of parents together to run a Bike Train to and from school.

Make sure that your child's bike fits well. With a growing child, you'll want to buy a good used bike, or from a store that has a trade-in program. There are also options that let you keep riding together, like a DIY tandem or a long-tail cargo bike that lets you tow a kid's bike so your child can ride some of the way.



“**Biking to school at an early age is key to learning to love cycling... as long as I'm biking with my children, they will bike on their own all over the city, on the road from grade 2 and up.**”



I found that a tandem bicycle was the easiest way to get children of different ages and abilities to participate at the same time. With a tandem, children don't get tired on long rides and as they grow older, you can feel them getting stronger and stronger.



Tips

- **Helmet:** still a must.
- **Bell or horn:** a must for young riders.
- **U-Lock:** make sure your child's bike is still there for the ride home.
- **Lights:** a must for riding in the dark or during rain, snow, etc.
- **Sidewalks:** your child can ride on the sidewalk until they have a bicycle with wheels 20 inches (50 cm) in diameter or larger. Once your child grows into a bike this size, around age 10, they should learn the skills to ride on quiet streets.

/// What's a Bike Train?

A Bike Train is a group of parents and children riding together, with adults rotating to act as ride leaders. It's a fun, low-stress way to start cycling to school and to get to know other parents in your neighbourhood.

/// On your way

Biking as a family will allow you to spend time together, keep you active and enjoy the sights and sounds around you. Here are a few of resources to help you on your biking journey.

- [Walk + Roll Peel Trails Map](#)
- [Google Maps](#): choose cycling directions
- [Peel Region Cyclists Handbook](#)
- [Ontario Young Cyclists Guide](#)
- [School Travel Planning Toolkits](#)
- [Family Biking Guide](#), Momentum
- [Bike to School Week Guide](#), CultureLink
- DIY bike repair spaces and other local initiatives as part of the [Peel Community Cycling Program](#)
- [The Peel Children's Safety Village](#)
- [Peel Public Health's School Travel Planning program](#)
- Join a local Community Ride organized by the [City of Mississauga](#) or [City of Brampton](#).

/// Biking to school (age 9-13)

From sidewalks to streets

The next step in your child's bicycling development is learning to ride on quiet streets. Although they're allowed to ride on the sidewalk if their bicycle has wheels less than 20 inches (50 cm) in diameter, children should begin to practice the skills they need to ride in the street starting around the age of 9. Important skills include:

Starting

- Starting position:
 - bum in front of the seat.
 - one foot on the ground.
 - one foot on a pedal, ~¾ of the way up.
- Push off with your ground foot.
- Push down with your pedal foot.
- Slide your bum onto the seat.
- Start pedalling.

Stopping

- Always use both brakes.
- Squeeze brakes gently.
- Slide your bum forward.
- Put one foot on the ground; leave the other foot on the pedal.

Straight line riding

- Get a good start.

- Keep your handlebars straight and try not to swerve.
- Find a practice space with a painted line (tennis or basketball courts work great!) and try to ride on top of the line.

Hand signals

- Left turn = left arm straight out.
- Right turn = right arm straight out or left arm bent and hand facing up.



left-hand turn



stop



right-hand turn



*alternate
right-hand turn*

- Stop = left arm straight out and down, downward box shape.

Turning

- Whichever direction you're turning, that pedal should be up.

- Right turn = right pedal up.
- Left turn = left pedal up.

Gears

1. Start in the lowest gear: largest cog in the rear.
2. Pedal until you build momentum.
3. Gear up one gear; if you have shifters on both sides of your handlebars, use the ones on the right first.
4. If your pedalling starts to feel slow and like you're having to push hard, go down one gear.
5. When slowing down, remember to gear down; when stopping, gear down all the way to first gear.
6. Tip: many children's bikes have a lot of gears, making it difficult to learn to use them effectively. Simplify the situation by setting your child's chain on the middle chain ring in front and just leaving it there; tell them to use only the right-hand (rear) shifter to change gears.

Maintenance

- **Essential gear:** floor pump with a gauge, bike chain lubricant, and rags.
- **Air:** show your child how to pump their tires. Check the maximum pressure needed on the tire sidewall (look for "PSI") and pump to slightly less than that number.
- **Brakes:** show your child how to check

their brakes by pushing the bike forward and squeezing each brake.

- **Chain:** wipe the chain with a dry rag, put one drop of lube on each link, pedal backwards to work the lube into the chain, and wipe off the excess lube with another rag.

Ride with your child regularly to help make sure they have the skills to ride independently for short trips to school or to local stores. If you start riding longer distances with your child and they get tired midway through, remember buses in Brampton and Mississauga have bike racks on the front that can help you and your bikes get home by transit.



/// FAQs

While every family's experience is unique, there are common strategies to build a support network as you begin to bike as a family. Think of this list as a roadmap to get you started.



Where do I begin?

Start small: practice riding in a park, quiet street or parking lot until you're 100% confident biking with your family.

Connect: find other families who ride together, and plan a regular time to meet up and practice, swap gear, and share tips.



How can I connect with other parents?

Check your school, library, or community centre's bulletin board.

Spread the word at parent-teacher nights or other social events at your school.

On social media? Put out a call to

connect with families who bike, tagging local cycling organizations and using a hashtag like **#FamilyBiking** or **#walkandrollpeel**.



How do I plan a route?

Find a route that works for you. Remember, the route that feels most safe and comfortable might not be the most direct one. An old-fashioned paper map is a great way to start planning your route. Printed maps of bike routes are provided by Mississauga, Brampton, and Caledon. You can find copies at your local library or recreation centre. You can find an online map of all trails and bike routes in Peel Region at walkandrollpeel.ca. You can also use

/// Nice-to-haves

Here are a few bits and bobs to make your family biking experience smooth and stress-free.

- Sturdy centre kick stand
- Five-point harness to support your child's upper body
- Front rack for storage
- Panniers to hold clothing and snacks
- Bungee cords
- Lightweight blanket, jacket, and backpack cover
- Warm or cold drinks in a travel mug
- Sunscreen
- Bluetooth speaker
- Big bike bell that kids can ring
- U-lock (compact and sturdy) and chain lock (versatile)

Google Maps' bike directions and ask experienced cyclists in your community.



Where can I find used bikes and parts?

Try DIY bike shops, co-ops and community centres.

Go online (Kijiji, LetGo, Craigslist) and search by location. You can also connect with parents and educators to coordinate a garage sale or part swap.



How do I make sure my child's bike and helmet fit?

For helmets: follow the 2-V-1 rule: 2 fingers between your eyebrow and your helmet, straps form a "V" around your ears, 1 finger distance between the strap and your chin.

/// Follow the 2-V-1 rule

1



2 fingers between your eyebrow and your helmet.

2



The straps should form a "V" around your ears.

3



1 finger should fit between the strap and your chin.

For bikes: find the right wheel size based on your child's inseam measurement (bike shops have size charts, or find one online). Adjust the seat with a multi-tool so that your child's knees are slightly bent when their foot is at the bottom of the pedal stroke. Adjust the handlebars so that your child can keep a comfortable hold and turn with their elbows slightly bent.



What are the options to carry my child on a bike?

There are many options and it comes down to your comfort and how close you want your child to be as you ride. Choose from a front carrier that nestles between your handlebars, back carrier that attaches to a sturdy rear rack, rear trailer, cargo bike (front and rear-loading options), or longtail (which allows children to sit on a platform behind the driver).

If you are carrying more than one child, look into electric-assisted options. Check out the Red Tricycle Guide for options. redtri.com
Smooth sailing: ride slowly and look for potholes and other obstructions when you have a small person on board.

Cycling is for every family!

Start your child on a journey to health, happiness, and freedom!



“

Our daughter is now 17 and bikes to high school every day. She also bikes around the city on her own—both for fun and for errands...

Cycling has empowered her and made her feel like the city is hers—to enjoy and to take care of.”

/// Learn more at

www.walkandrollpeel.ca

www.culturelink.ca

www.cycleto.ca