

BALANCE BIKES SESSION PLAN



A **Balance Bike** is a simplified bicycle with no pedals and is used to practice the **#1 skill** needed to ride a bike, **balance!**

A **regular** bicycle can be used as a balance bike by simply **removing the pedals**:

- * A 15mm spanner is needed
- * The drive side (right side with cogs) unscrews as usual
- * The non-drive side (left side with no cogs) unscrews the **opposite** way (clockwise to loosen)

There are **4 important skills** to learn before moving onto a bike with pedals:

strides: Demonstrate how a giant or T-Rex walks (get used to holding weight of bike)

quick steps: Demonstrate how an T-Rex runs (speed creates momentum which creates balance)

hops: Demonstrate kangaroo hops (2 feet push at same time – tricky coordination for little-uns)

gliding: Challenge the child to quick step or hop as a run up and then lift both feet in the air and glide for 2 meters before putting them back down. Increase the distance with confidence.

To improve **balance and safety awareness**, always encourage the child to **keep their head up** and look ahead. Find a feature to have them focus on if possible.

Typical session:

Safety checks and set up:

- 1: **Check** the **bikes** e.g. tyres pumped, no loose parts, brake works etc
- 2: Do a quick **check** of the **playground** to make sure there is no debris, stones, glass etc
- 3: Place **cones** in a circle large enough for your group (at least 1 bike apart)
- 4: Fit **helmets** to each child

Basics and ability assessment:

- 1 **Walking with the bike**: Walk around outside of cones (off the bike), in a circle, holding handlebars with both hands. 30 secs – 1 min.
- 2 **Using the brake**: Point out brake and its use. Walk around in circle again and say STOP (children stop using brake). Repeat several times in a fun suspenseful way (like musical chairs)
- 3 **Sitting properly**: **Follow this sequence** **a** Sit on the bike hands by your side **b** Flap your wings **c** beat your chest like a gorilla **d** hands in front **e** hands on handle bars **f** wiggle your bottoms **g** (**most important**) Tap your feet, lift both feet off the ground while sitting on the bike
- 4 **Striding**: Pretend to be a T-rex and demo big strides. Children imitate sitting on bikes around the circle. Monitor and encourage where needed.
- 5 **Quick steps**: Speed is key! Pretend to be T-Rex running after food. Children imitate on bikes in circle. Encourage as much speed as possible. Bums must not leave saddle!

Gaining speed and confidence:

- 1 **Follow the leader hops**: All children line up behind you. Demo hopping like a kangaroo. Lead children around playground in a loose figure 8 as they hop along on bikes (best to have assistant helping those that need more guidance).
- 2 **Push off & glide**: Find a wall or line. Have children line up with rear wheel on line or wall. Demo 1 big push off and glide as far as possible and mark it with a cone. Children try one at a time with you marking their attempt with a cone. Repeat and encourage them to go further.

To see some of this in action **watch our video**: tinyurl.com/losestabilisers

For more information and guidance, request that your school run a **learn to ride** session or a **parent coffee Q&A** session. Your Sustrans Bike It officer will be more than happy to help.

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Let's build upon those skills!

Repeat as necessary steps 1-4 for children as a warm up exercise.

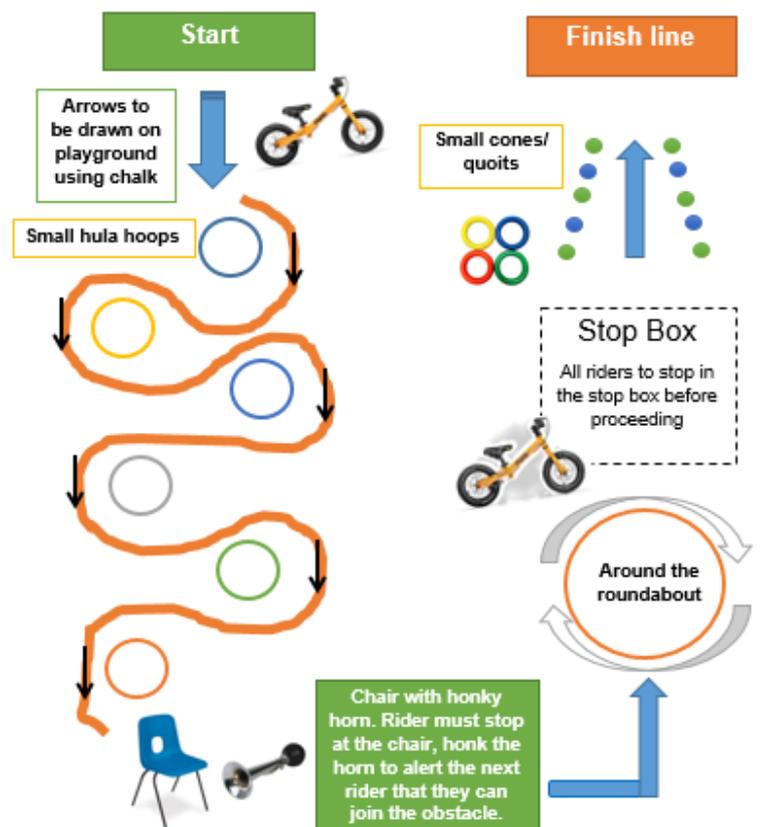
5 **Free style**: Mark out the perimeter using cones or bean bags. Encourage children to manoeuvre around in the area allowing them to practice any skill that they have already learnt. Any direction is fine but remind children to slow down or stop if they come too close to another rider.

6 **Slalom**: Using cones or bean bags mark out a course down the length of the playground to create a zig-zag pattern. With appropriate space in between to allow the child to complete each turn. You may start by walking the children through the course without their bikes or in front of them to remind them of where they need to make their turns.

7 **Balance bike braking**: Set up a start and finish line. Children begin by standing on clean side of the bike (non-chain side) with their hands resting on handlebars. Check that children can reach the brake lever. Encourage children to gently squeeze (note that balance bikes have one brake). Children may then walk the course beside their bike to practice bringing the bike to a stop. When children are confident with this, they may mount their bikes, glide and gently apply their bikes to bring them to a stop.

8 **Stop box**: Set up a start and finish line. Mark out a stop box area at one end of the playground – you could use chalk to draw out a box or create one using bean bags or cones. Children will glide up to the stop box. Encourage them to stop with their feet in the stop box. This should be hard as they need to reach the stop box at speed. Next progress them to using their brake to aid them stopping in the stop box.

9 **Obstacle course**: Use anything at hand to make the course e.g. cones, bean bags, hoops, skipping ropes or chalk lines to allow children to practice their skills. Start children one at a time and slowly to begin with. Once they are familiar with course set out you may encourage them to go a bit quicker. For progression children may also have some ideas as to the choice of layout for the obstacle course.



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