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The AFLCA will provide useful information on a regular basis for practitioners that can either enhance your knowledge of the Alberta industry, or provide evidence-informed information to expand your practice. If you are a researcher, or a qualified practitioner please feel free to submit ideas or articles of 750 - 1500 words to us @ info@provincialfitnessunit.ca

Any Body Can Cycle: Instructing an inclusive outdoor cycling program for youth & teens

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Experiencing riding a bicycle independently for the first time is a memory most of us have ingrained in our minds. Remembering taking off from your parent's supporting hands, feeling the wind and rush of adrenaline flow across your body as you pedaled forward in a (more or less) straight line is unforgettable. Nonetheless, there is still a great learning curve ahead in order to cycle proficiently. This curve is much steeper for kids living with impairment as they often require additional considerations for skillful participation (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010).

Any body can learn and experience cycling outdoors but what does it take to successfully offer kids of any ability level the opportunity to do so? An inclusive cycling program can provide this opportunity but there are many factors to consider. This article discusses and provides recommendations on how to best prepare for and instruct an inclusive outdoor cycling program.

BENEFITS OF CYCLING

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that children accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily. Cycling for recreation, active transportation and for social outings with family and friends can be a fun way to incorporate the recommended amount of daily physical activity into one's day. Cycling can also help kids stay physically active throughout life as riding a bike is a skill that is remembered into adulthood. Hence the idiom "it's like riding a bike" for how a skill that is learned

as a child is easy to rediscover. Encouraging your child to cycle while they are young also supports the establishment of healthy exercise habits. Another benefit of cycling is that it transfers to other modes of physical activity as it develops and combines;

- Cardiovascular Fitness
- Muscular Endurance
- Core Strength
- Flexibility
- Balance
- Bilateral Coordination
- Spatial Awareness
- And General Body Strength

(Andersen et al, 2009; Klein et al, 2005; Oja et al, 2010).

CYCLING IN A GROUP

Cycling with others is not only fun but also facilitates the development of meaningful social interactions and gives the feeling of acceptance. Barriers to social inclusion can be overcome in an inclusive group setting (Abbot & Mcconkey,



2006). Riding with others can provide a feeling of support, making a developing cyclist more willing to try new skills if they know they are not alone in learning the skill and are receiving positive encouragement from peers. A group setting also provides teaching and learning opportunities such as leading by example, helping others, taking turns, working together, and problem solving, to name just a few.

CONSIDERATIONS TO PREPARE FOR AND INSTRUCT AN INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR CYCLING PROGRAM

Know Your Participants: Get to know your participants and their ability level ahead of time. This can be achieved by contacting parents and requesting information on their child's unique requirements and asking if any adaptations or considerations need to be implemented. Keep in mind, a portion of the first day can be used to assess ability levels and identify adaptations that may need to be made.

Equipment: The beginning of the first day is also an ideal time to evaluate bicycle equipment and to see if any changes need to be made. The most common mistake is not having the correctly sized bike for a child. A poorly sized bike not only impedes learning, but it also compromises safety. Buying a bike that is bigger and thinking "my child will grow into it" is a myth. The same applies to helmets which are required if under the age of 18. Other requirements (as stated in The Province of Alberta Traffic Safety Act) are a working bell or horn and working breaks. It is also highly recommended that everyone has their own water bottle in order to stay hydrated. Organizations such as Sport Central (www.sportcentral.org) can assist in providing bikes for kids in need across central and northern Alberta.

Balance Risk and Reward: Inherently, cycling is a hazardous activity with the potential for many bumps and bruises to

occur along the way. When riding a bike it is not so much if you crash; it is when you crash. Children living with impairment have additional factors and contraindications that increase the potential for injury while riding a bike, but adaptations can help to create a safe experience for all. It is important to realize that taking risks is part of growing up and cycling provides an excellent opportunity for all children to learn, assess, and manage taking those risks. Balance safety with making appropriate priorities for optimal child development and understand how limiting engagement in outdoor risky play hinders child development (Mariana et al., 2012). Communicating to the participants and their families about the risks inherent in cycling and planning for them should be part of the process.

FIVE STEPS FOR MANAGING RISK & CREATING A SAFE, FUN EXPERIENCE

- 1. Plan the Trail:** Know the trip details and the trail well. This includes familiarizing yourself with the path ahead of time and checking its condition and noting obstacles that may have appeared due to weather or construction in the area. Testing the trail beforehand will also provide you with a true sense of its difficulty level. Additionally, you can also create a map with checkpoints and to show the elevation profile. Google Earth is an excellent and free program that allows you to create this sort of map.
- 2. Be Prepared for an Emergency:** Have an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) on hand with all pertinent participant information. This includes parent contact information (cell phone numbers), allergies, and medication. Having the map with checkpoints can greatly aid a parent or EMS with directions if needed. Checkpoints are also recommended in case a participant becomes

tired or requires an early pick-up for non-emergency reasons. A portable standard First Aid Kit, mosquito repellent, and sunscreen are also a must.

- 3. Prepare for the Weather:** A little bit of rain or inclement weather should not deter you from riding outside. Ask parents to dress their kids appropriately and to pack extra clothing in a backpack to be used if needed. Some of the most memorable biking trips occur when it is raining as kids get to experience riding through the mud and getting themselves and their bikes dirty. The look on a parent's face when they see their child return covered in mud with a huge smile on their face is absolutely priceless. However, set cut-offs for weather and cancel the program if the conditions are unfavourable (e.g. thunderstorm or freezing temperatures).
- 4. Be Prepared for Mechanical Issues:** Bikes will break down and maintenance will be required, whether it's a flat tire, a slipped chain, or a seat becoming loose or needing adjustment. You do not need to possess advanced mechanical skills in order to fix common bike issues but a little bit of knowledge can go a long way. The Edmonton Bicycle Commuters Society (www.edmontonbikes.ca) and the University of Calgary (www.ucalgary.ca) have excellent bike repair workshops. A short list of portable and affordable tools found at a local bike shop and online include:
 - Flat tire repair kit
 - Bicycle allen key set
 - Bicycle wrench set.

- 5. Have Fun!** Plan trails that have stops at well-known local landmarks for a picture opportunity or selfie with the group. Have theme days like "Water Day" where the ride ends at a spray park or "Off-Road Day" where the group rides through muddy and dirt trails. Create fun team names such as "The Howlers" or "Cyclepaths" to bring the group together. The goal is to keep the kids motivated and interested in the program.

There are many benefits to cycling, especially when taking into consideration the long term impact it has on physical development. Furthermore, riding in a group setting provides additional social developmental opportunities that can have an indefinite effect in day-to-day life. An inclusive outdoor cycling program can support these developments and allow kids the opportunity to become more proficient cyclists. It is the role of the instructor to get to know all participant needs and provide adaptations to facilitate these experiences for any body and any ability level.

- References available on request

Sources for Adapted Cycles:

EDMONTON - [You Can Ride 2: Borrow a Bike](#)

CALGARY - [CP Kids Adapted Bike Program](#)

Related Article: - [Adapted Bikes Open Up Roads and Pathways to Children With a Wide Range of Abilities](#), *Calgary Herald*, May 2015

For more information about adapted physical activity, contact [The Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement](#).