

Fight the Fight: Make Your Kids Wear Helmets

Now that it is finally spring (or so we think until the next snowflake falls), my neighbors are out in full force – walking, running, pushing baby strollers, and being pulled by dogs. And then there are the kids – so many kids – biking and long boarding. Who could blame them? Kids are not meant to be cooped up for 9 months out of the year.

However, I am continually bothered by the overwhelming number of kids I see on their bikes and long boards without helmets. (I can just hear my own children now as they read this – “Oh no, here she goes.”) I see kids all over my neighborhood and surrounding community, as young as 6 and as old as 15, biking and long boarding without helmets. (I’m guessing the 16 plus crowd with driver’s licenses are less likely to use a bike for transportation.)

Yes, I know helmets don’t “look cool.” One of my own children simply refused to use his bike because I would not let him ride without a helmet. He had some long walks to his friends’ houses. The truth is that with a little looking on the web or in stores, you just might find a ‘cool looking’ bike helmet your child (or you) might really like and wear.

We may fault the teens who should know better, some of whom appease their helmet-loving parents by leaving with the helmet, but taking it off and hanging it from the handlebars the minute they are out of view. But for the most part, I must put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of parents who do not enforce a helmet rule in their households. I have talked to some friends about this, and many either tell me they agree with me but choose not to “fight the battle” with their kids, or hearken back to days of yore when “we didn’t wear helmets when we grew up” (in the ‘60’s, ‘70’s, or ‘80’s).

If I’m feeling sassy, I might respond to the latter comment with something along the lines of “we also didn’t use seat belts in cars” or “back in my parents’ day, the prevailing wisdom was that cigarettes were good for you.” Obviously we know more now.

But I think the best argument can be made with statistics:

From www.childrensafetynetwork.org:

Among people 19 and under:

- Head injuries accounted for 62.6 percent of bicycle fatalities.
- Collisions with motor vehicles accounted for 75.7 percent of bicycle fatalities.
- 61.7 percent of motor vehicle collision deaths were due to head injury.
- Bike crashes land more kids in hospital emergency rooms than any other sport. Every day, about 1,000 children end up in the ER with injuries from bikes - like broken bones or brain concussions.
- Almost every day, one child dies from biking injuries and others suffer lifetime problems, like limping or brain damage.
- In 2010, an estimated 52,000 pedal-cyclists were injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes. (NTHSA)
Eighteen percent (or an estimated 9,000) of the pedal-cyclists who were injured were age 14 and younger (NTHSA)

Finally, in an article published in the *Clinical Pediatrics* journal, researchers analyzed fifteen years of data on emergency room visits for individuals injured while riding a bicycle. They found that children with head injuries were 3 times as likely as adults to be hospitalized and were 6 times as likely to have their injuries result in death (Mehan, Gardner, Smith, & McKenzie, 2008).

Parents, I know we are all concerned that our children aren't getting enough exercise, and so we sigh with relief when they put down the video game controller and head outside. Just please, take the extra minute to explain to your child the dangers of biking/boarding without a helmet, and then if the explanation does not convince them, stand your ground and tell them they have to wear it or they can walk to wherever it is they are going. It is worth fighting the battle to keep our kids safe.

Respectfully submitted by,

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For more information on bike safety, visit:

KidsHealth: http://kidshealth.org/kid/watch/out/bike_safety.html

Kids Safe: <http://www.safekids.org/bike>

US Consumer Product Safety Commission: <http://www.cpsc.gov/onsafety/2013/05/bicycle-safety-its-no-accident/>

If you are interested in learning more about the work of the Washington County Child Protection Citizen Review Panel, visit the Washington County website: <http://www.co.washington.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=1549>

Or, call Don Pelton, Community Services Supervisor, at 651-430-6631.