



TEACHING MOUNTAIN BIKING TO YOUNG STUDENTS

Working with Youth and Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Teaching skills is the easy part; working with children takes planning, structure, finesse and patience. Remember, young people are going through profound changes: physically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally. This can be a period when children feel self-conscious and awkward. The coach must be compassionate and caring. This does not mean the coach is lenient or has low expectations. Young people tend to thrive best in environments in which there is structure, consistency and high expectations.

A coach needs to:

- Be consistent
- Expect the best and set high standards
- Be clear about expectations
- Treat everyone with respect
- Listen when the student has something to say
- Have a sense of humor
- Be kind yet firm
- Set consequences and follow through
- Recognize the importance of structure
- Be patient and remain calm
- Remember that the kids are going through a lot, especially when they are driving you crazy
- Create a warm environment for all (gender, race, language, etc.); do not tolerate discrimination
- Remember a great rider is not necessarily a great coach

Coaching Guidance

The following are tips for effectively coaching young students.

Engage and Motivate

- Enthusiasm is contagious
- Praise effort rather than outcome

Experiential Learning (Learning through experience)

- Minimize talk. Try not to lecture students. Keep discussion to less than two minutes. A short attention span is your biggest challenge.
- Teach through inquiry. Instruct by asking questions.
- Create a safe space to practice and give lots of opportunities for practice.
- Give students opportunities to lead and take responsibility.
- Do not yell. No one likes to be yelled at. It reduces moral and self-esteem, and comprises a positive environment.
- Keep it lively and fun.
- If riders start checking out, transition to practicing a skill, asking questions, mini competitions, etc.
- Have riders practice and then report back and what they observed, what worked, what didn't work, etc.
- Have students reflect on a skill after practicing.
 - what worked
 - what happens if you...
 - what did you learn
 - do not necessarily tell them what they were doing wrong, let them identify for themselves

Feedback

- Give specific feedback, both positive and constructive. Tell the student what s/he is doing well and what can be improved.
- Try to get riders to think about what they can do better> Ask "why did you hang up on that feature?" instead of describing what they did wrong.
- Give feedback on one thing at a time. Try to focus on no more than 3 items during a clinic.

Motivating a discouraged rider

- Use praise and positive feedback. Identify and point out strengths and successes.
- Set achievable goals and celebrate small victories. Break the ride into bits & pieces and celebrate as you go.
- Know when to be firm. You may have to require a student to get back on the bike. After several rounds of encouragement, you may have to be firmer.

Addressing Challenging Behavior

- Prevention is key. Establish yourself as an authority figure, set high expectations, maintain structure and follow through, etc.
- Address the issue with the student. Ask what is happening that is causing the behavior. Explain the consequences of continuing the behavior.

Physical Safety

- Set a tone that promotes safe behavior.
- Follow through on consequences for unsafe behavior.
- Teach riders about good hydration, nutrition, dress, and bike maintenance.
- Hold skills clinics/evaluation prior to getting on the trail.
- Have adequate rider to coach ratios.
- Choose appropriate ride/terrain for the skill level of your students.
- Make sure your fellow coaches are prepared.

Emotional Safety

- Encourage and demand respectful behavior.
- Do not tolerate rude, sexist, racist, or cruel behavior.
- Intervene whenever you hear put downs or derogatory language.
 - Negative joking can be hurtful and should be addressed. Do not treat it as “kids will be kids.”
 - All students need to know that they are in a caring and safe environment and you are their ally.
- Do not allow sexist, racist, body-type, or homophobic comments/jokes.
 - When these things happen try to use them as teachable moments and try to make sure the students understand why it is hurtful and unacceptable.
 - Reach out to students who are feeling left out, having a hard time, or just need extra support.

Coach Philosophy and Style

- Be true to who you are.
- Coaching kids is different than coaching adults.
- Create a positive experience for kids.
 - ensure fairness
 - reward effort, not outcome
 - treat all with equal respect and attention, regardless of skill level
 - balance between challenging students to improve and honoring them for where they are
- Set the tone at the beginning of the clinic by making a statement about trying new things. Emphasize that making mistakes is how we learn. Explain that you

expect everyone to be supportive of each other and that put downs will not be tolerated.

- Never force, or coerce, a rider into trying something they do not feel ready for. Make sure if a rider decides to opt out of trying a new obstacle that other riders do not put them down for this.

Coaching Roles

Coaches do more than teach biking skills.

Risk manager

Evaluate inherent risk vs. exaggerated risk

Role model

Model appropriate behavior. Students are watching what you are doing.

- Be caring, respectful, and passionate about mountain biking
- Use appropriate language
- Don't criticize or gossip about others
- Respect yourself, others, and the environment
- Be yourself

Motivator

- Be energized and upbeat
- Cheer on students
- Give specific feedback and lots of praise
- Celebrate victories

Authority Figure

- Speak clearly, stand straight, and be concise when presenting
- Do not yell at students, unless it's an urgent safety issue
- Expect respect and attention
- Address poor behavior quickly
- Set rules and follow through with consequences

What Students Expect from a Coach

- Leadership
- Structure
- Compassion
- Caring
- Praise
- Discipline

Preparation*

- Ensure students have the skills to ride safely before going on a trail.
- Establish and enforce rules. Use teachable moments
- Make sure fellow coaches and students have suitable biking attire including helmets, gloves, shoes, eyewear, and clothing appropriate to the weather.
- Perform bike maintenance.
- Check bike fit.
- Ensure that students have food and hydration appropriate for the lesson/ride.
- Choose rides appropriate to the students' skill level.
- Double-check adult to student ratios.
- Use proper ride formation: Have an adult at the lead and rear of each group. No student goes ahead of the lead or behind the rear. Stop and wait for the entire group at every intersection. Give the last riders a chance to rest when they get to an intersection.
- Be prepared with a first aid kit, mechanical kit, and extra food/water, etc.

*Most of this information is contained in the *National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) Coach Manual*.

SKILLS CLINICS

PRE-RIDE

Bike Fit

- Ensure the bike is fit properly
- The seat is adjusted up/down
- The seat is adjusted front/back
- The brake levers and gear shifters are located properly on the handle bars

Bike Maintenance

- ABCs (air, brakes, chain)
- Make sure the tire pressure is appropriate for the activity
- Make sure the brakes are working
- Make sure the chain is clean and lubed
- Make sure the derailleur is shifting properly

Identify Parts of the Bike

- Drivetrain – gears, chain, etc.
- Shifters
- Bottom bracket
- Brakes
- Head Tube
- Etc.

Helmet Check

- Make sure student helmets are in good operating shape (i.e. prior dents)
- Make sure the helmet is snug on the student's head without restricting breathing (two finger rule)

Clothing Check

- Make sure they have gloves
- Make sure they have appropriate shoes
- Make sure their clothing that will not catch in the chain or on the seat
- Make sure they have eyewear
- Knee/Shin guards and elbow pads when necessary

Trail Stewardship/Etiquette

OMBC believes good trail etiquette is of paramount importance. We love our shared-use trails and strive to minimize user conflicts as much as possible. We'll ensure that all participants are aware of the basics of trail etiquette and how to help build mutual respect among trail users.

At the core of OMBC's mission is our commitment to building and sustaining some of the amazing trail systems that we're so fortunate to have along the northern Front Range. Part of the youth program will focus on how club members further this mission, and build awareness of some of the ongoing efforts shepherded by OMBC.

RIDING SKILLS/INSTRUCTION

Braking

Discuss the importance of braking, especially front versus back. 60% of stopping power is in the front wheel. Review proper braking technique. Hold a braking contest on a flat area and then on a downhill area without skidding. Have the students practice dropping their heels and getting their weight back on the bike. Teach emergency braking using only the front brake, feathering, etc. Practice braking without touching the handles (i.e. light hands, heavy feet).

Stop, Look, Plant

Discuss keeping your feet on the pedals until the bike is stopped. Braking by putting your feet on the ground can result in a broken ankle. Make sure the students come to a complete stop, look where they are stepping, and then step off the bike. You can make this more advanced by doing it from an elevated platform to the ground.

Pedaling

Discuss foot location on the pedals, dropping the heel, and the four zones of the pedal. Practice pedaling drills. Example drills include one foot pedaling, ratcheting (mini pedal strokes), and un-weighting the front tire. Practice front wheelies.

Shifting

Discuss why shifting is important. They are like gears in a car. Have them pedal in high gear then have them pedal in low gear. Explain and practice shifting before the gears are under tension.

Vision

Discuss where to look. Have them walk staring at their feet. Do a circle drill. Practice looking through a corner. Do the finger drill.

Attack Position

Discuss the attack position. Ask the students why it is important. Demonstrate bike-body separation, 4 & 5-point stance, weight transfer, climbing, descending, etc. Ask them what the correct attack positions are for various situations (e.g., center weight over crank, human shock absorber, hinges). Reiterate “light hands, heavy feet.”

Pumping

Discuss what pumping is and why it is useful in a race/ride. Have them practice pumping from a moving start and complete stop. Pump on a slight downhill, level ground, and uphill.

Cornering

Discuss the importance of good cornering technique. Discuss having bodyweight over the crank, bike/body separation, vision, etc. Do a vision drill. On a paved area have two students, 180° apart, ride circles around a cone staring at each other.

Slow Balance

Discuss the importance of slow balance, especially on technical terrain. Discuss weight distribution and vision. Have students practice doing a track stand with spotters if necessary. Do a slow race contest. Practice going over features slowly.

RIDING ACTIVITIES

Neighborhood Ride

Go on a 12 - 15 mile non-stop ride in the adjacent neighborhoods.

Hills

Practice body positioning and braking riding up and down short hills.

Obstacle Course

Have students line up. At intervals have students ride a skill line. Mobile obstacles can be added to the skill line to change things up.

Tire Repair

Make sure students have the skill and equipment to change a flat tire. Discuss tubeless tires.

Chain Repair

Make sure students have the skill and equipment to fix a broken chain. Replace a link and quicklink.