OUR MISSION
TO PROVIDE SAFE, FUN, MEASURED AND EQUITABLE RACING & RIDING IN ALL U.S. CYCLING DISCIPLINES.

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USACycling.org
WELCOME TO USA CYCLING’S YOUTH AND JUNIOR RIDING AND RACING GUIDE!

Becoming a cyclist begins at an early age. And what starts with enjoying the feeling of freedom and independence, can grow into a more focused pursuit of the sport. As kids become more proficient on their bike, taking their riding to the next level and learn to race may be the next natural progression.

All across the country, Youth and Junior riders are experiencing the thrill of cycling competition in greater numbers than ever before. From racing for a high school Mountain Bike team, to riding with their family in a local Cyclocross race complete with bubble machines, to finding a local velodrome and experiencing the thrill of going as fast as possible around the track, kids are moving from being “cyclists” to “racers.”

Of course many kids will never race competitively, instead they may elect to join clubs or programs that support cycling as a fun, social activity. These programs promote a sense of community, one that is built on a foundation of simply a love of riding their bike. While this guide is focused primarily on introducing kids to racing, it is important to recognize that the sport is not limited to competition. There are many wonderful youth and junior programs that are not race focused. Whether you want to race or just ride your bike, this guide is intended to guide you through the sport.

We hope you have fun and embrace all the joys and challenges cycling has to offer!

YOUR FRIENDS AT USA CYCLING
Like most sports, cycling utilizes a unique set of terminology. Whether it’s Road cycling, Cyclocross, Mountain Bike, Track racing or BMX, many terms are good to add to the vocabulary. Below is a list of the most common terms used throughout the sport of cycling.

**ATTACK:** A sudden attempt to get away from a rider or group of riders.

**BERM:** An embankment on a BMX track.

**BIF:** Another term for a crash.

**BLACK LINE:** A 5-centimeter-wide line at the bottom of a velodrome track which defines the length of the track.

**BLOCKING:** When a rider impedes the progress of another rider, usually done as part of a team strategy to slow down the main field when a team member is ahead in a breakaway.

**BLUE BAND:** The section between the racing surface on a velodrome and the infield. Technically, it’s not illegal to ride on the Blue Band, but it is illegal to advance one’s position while riding on it.

**BMX:** Abbreviation for Bicycle Motocross.

**BONK:** When a rider completely runs out of energy.

**BREAKAWAY:** A rider or group of riders who has separated themselves ahead of the main pack.

**BRIDGE THE GAP:** When a rider or group of riders attempt to advance from a group of riders to one further ahead.

**CARAVAN:** The line of cars which typically follows a road race; includes team cars, race officials, media, medical, VIP and neutral support vehicles.

**CHASERS:** Riders who are attempting to advance to a rider or group of riders ahead.

**CHICANE:** A series of tight, technical turns.

**CRITERIUM:** A multi-lap road race on a course usually a mile or less in length.

**DIRECTOR SPORTIF:** The traditional name for the team manager.

**DOMESTIQUE:** A rider who typically rides in support of a designated team leader.

**DRAFTING:** Riding in the slipstream of another rider ahead. A rider drafting off another generally expends 30% less energy.

**DROP:** To leave another rider or group of riders behind by attacking.

**ECHELON:** A line of riders positioned behind one another to receive maximum protection from the wind.

**ENDO:** A crash which results in a rider going over the front handlebars.

**ESPOIR:** A French term used to describe the Under-23 category of riders aged 19-22.

**ETAPE:** A French term for a stage of a stage race.

**FEED ZONE:** A designated section on a road course where riders can receive food and water from their soigneur.

**FEEDING:** When riders receive food and liquids throughout a race, usually from a team car that follows the race or a soigneur positioned in the feed zone.

**FIELD:** The main group of riders, also known as the Pack, Peloton or Bunch.

**FIELD SPRINT:** The final sprint between the main group of riders in a race, not always for first place.

**GEAR RATIO:** The combination of gears used between the front chainring and the rear gear cluster.

**GRANNY GEAR:** The lowest gear ratio on a multi-speed bicycle, smallest chainring in front and largest in back.

**HARD-TAIL:** A mountain bike which only has front suspension.

**HOLE-SHOT:** Taking the lead position out of the starting gate going into the first turn, used in BMX racing.
JUMP: A sudden acceleration, often at the start of a sprint.
KICK: The final burst of speed in a sprint.
LANTERNE ROUGE: French for Red Lantern, as found at the end of a railway train. Used to describe the last-placed rider in a race.
LEAD OUT: A team-oriented move in which one rider begins a sprint to give a head start to a teammate riding in their draft.
MOTO: Used to describe a heat of a BMX race.
MUSSETTE: A bag filled with food, water and energy drinks distributed to riders in a feed zone.
NEO-PRO: Cycling’s term for a rookie at the professional level.
PELOTON: The main group of riders during a road race.
PRIME: A mid-race contest in which riders sprint for points, cash or prizes during a criterium, sometimes used to animate a race.
PROLOGUE: A short individual time trial at the beginning of a stage race; used to assign a leader’s jersey for the first stage.
PULL THROUGH: When a rider moves to the front of a paceline and takes their turn blocking the wind at the front.
PULL OFF: When a rider moves to one side of a paceline to allow another rider to pull through.
SAG WAGON: A vehicle that follows a race and picks up riders who are unable to finish.
SINGLETRACK: A narrow off-road trail which is only wide enough for bikes to ride in a single-file formation.
SITTING IN: When one rider refuses to take a pull and break the wind for a group in which he's riding.
SLIPSTREAM: The pocket of air created by a moving rider, just as in automobile or motorcycle racing.

SOFT-TAIL: A mountain bike that has both front and rear suspension.
SOIGNEUR: A French term for cycling’s equivalent of a trainer. A soigneur usually looks after the physical health of a rider and gives massages.
SPRINT: The sudden burst of speed before the race’s finish or an intermediate sprint point.
SPRINTER’S LANE: The space between the Black Line and The Sprinter’s Line on the velodrome. A rider leading in this zone cannot be passed on the inside.
SPRINTER’S LINE: A 5-centimeter-wide line 90-centimeters above the Black Line.
STAGE RACE: A multi-day event which combines several races. The rider with the lowest cumulative time is declared the winner.
STAGIAIRE: An amateur rider who gets an opportunity to compete with a professional team during the season in order to gain experience at the pro level.
TECH ZONE: A section on a mountain bike course where riders can exchange parts or receive mechanical assistance from others.
TAKE A FLYER: When a rider attacks the main pack and creates a solo breakaway.
TIME TRIAL: An individual or team race against the clock.
TRACK STAND: Balancing a bike without forward motion. This is a technique used in track racing in which competitors come to a complete standstill in order to force their opponent to take the lead.
VELODROME: An oval, banked cycling track used for track racing.
WHEEL SUCKER: A derogatory term used to describe someone who rides in a pack without taking a pull at the front and blocking the wind.

TERMINOLOGY continued
IDENTIFY A TYPE OF RIDING OR RACE EVENT TO PARTICIPATE IN

For many, choosing a type of riding or race event is based on the type of bike you own; for others, the decision may be driven based on the type of riding you enjoy.

- Do you like riding dirt roads and trails or are you more comfortable on urban/paved bike paths?
- Do you live in an area where there is a velodrome (cycling track)? Many tracks have beginner programs and often lend bikes.
- Is there a team or school cycling league you are interested in joining? If so, what types of riding are they doing?
- Mountain biking has different race formats and the types of bikes used in those formats can vary. Many cross-country Mountain Bike racers can ride a “hard tail” bike, but gravity or downhill racing will require a bike with front and rear suspension.
- Cyclocross racing is essentially steeplechase racing over obstacles on a bike and is gaining in popularity. Generally, if your bike has some form of knobby tire that can ride through mud, dirt, sand or gravel, you can race cyclocross.

DECIDING WHERE AND WHAT YOU WANT TO RIDE IS KEY TO GETTING STARTED.

If you are interested in racing, keep three main considerations in mind when purchasing a bike:

- The style of the bike and the type of racing it is designed for
- The quality and material of the bike frame (manufacturing technology is always advancing, and bikes are built with a variety of different wheel sizes, and with different materials like carbon, aluminum and titanium which have different material strengths and weight)
- The fit of the bike (Young riders can grow out of a bike quickly. When making a bike purchase, try not to select a bike larger than what your child can easily maneuver because they will “grow in to it.” A poorly fitting bike is a sure way to squash the enthusiasm of your rider. It can also be dangerous.)

If interested in racing at a USA Cycling sanctioned event, you will need to purchase either an annual membership or one-day race license. More information of race licenses can be found at www.usacycling.org/membership.
CONNECT LOCALLY – JOIN A LOCAL CYCLING CLUB OR TEAM

In many areas of the country, a network of teams and clubs is focused on Junior and Youth cycling development. One of the largest of these organizations is the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA). NICA teams focus on Mountain Bike racing and are ideal for children in grades 6 through 12.

Many other organizations also support Youth cycling and racing programs, some starting children as early as 3 years old. There are organizations with racing teams, and others that simply provide cycling as an after school activity. Many YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs or local Parks and Recreation Departments offer Youth cycling programs. (USA Cycling’s Directory of top permitted Youth cycling programs coming soon)

I wanted to say a big thank you for everything you provided for my son during his first year as a member of [Boulder Junior Cycling]. Being a part of BJC was everything we expected and more. You all should be very proud of what you have accomplished and the many life lessons you are able to give kids and adults. My wife and I probably learned more about how to be good parents than my son did about being a good kid.

When I asked my son why he likes BJC, he didn’t talk about his race results. He likes the interaction with other kids and the coaches. He said he learned about facing challenges and overcoming unexpected obstacles. He developed friendships with his teammates that happened to be his competitors also. He was given the opportunity to be a mentor to younger kids. But most of all he felt he was part of a family that truly cared for him and would always be there for him.

COURTESY OF BOULDER JUNIOR CYCLING
GET THE GEAR

Cycling, like many sports, requires an investment in proper gear. After your bike, the second most important piece of equipment is your helmet. It must fit well and meet at a minimum CPSC Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standards.

Other gear to consider:

- Cycling apparel (jersey, shorts/bib with chamois, leg or arm warmers, jacket, socks, gloves, hat)
- Cycling shoes – it is not necessary to purchase cycling specific shoes, and for many riders, tennis shoes will work just fine
- Eye protection (glasses or goggles)
- Tool kit with tire changing tools and extra tubes (learn how to change a tire at a clinic – frequently offered by your local bike shop)
- A hydration system or water bottle in a water bottle cage mounted onto the frame of the bicycle

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY – CONNECT WITH US

Following USA Cycling on social media is one of the best ways to learn about cycling in the U.S. From inspirational stories about talented National Team members to Instagram takeovers from collegiate cycling “reporters”, learn more about cycling in the U.S. on the USA Cycling Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or TikTok channels.

Click to follow @usacycling
UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLING DISCIPLINES

ROAD CYCLING

**Bike Style**
Skinnier tires and drop handle bars

**Season**
Early spring through mid-summer.

**Race formats**
Time Trial, Road Race, Criterium and multi-day stage races.

Cyclocross

**Bike Style**
Looks like a road bike but with knobby tires. A mountain bike may also be used in many Cyclocross Races

**Season**
Fall and winter months

**Race format**
Cyclocross is like a steeplechase, but on a bike, with off-road courses that can consist of grass, dirt, sand, mud, pavement, short, steep hills, off-camber sections and a few obstacles. The obstacles may include low, wood planks called barriers, stairs, steep hills or logs. These force the rider to get off and remount their bike multiple times a lap. Racing within a set time, the riders will make multiple laps of the course.

Cyclocross, often referred to as ‘cross or CX, has its origins in Europe in the early 1900s. The discipline is known for its fun, casual atmosphere.

Track

**Bike Style**
Fixed gear, not single-speed, no brakes.

**Season**
Summer

**Race format**
Cyclists make their way around a velodrome in Track cycling – a closed, banked oval. Velodromes vary widely in total distance, shape and degree of banking, giving each velodrome its own personality.

There are roughly 29 velodromes in the U.S. Frequently, beginner race programs are held at velodromes which can offer track bike rentals as riders experience the discipline.
UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLING DISCIPLINES

MOUNTAIN BIKE

Bike Style
Suspension frames, fat knobby tires, flat bars

Season
Spring, summer and fall

Race formats

BMX

Bike Style
Suspension frames, fat knobby tires, flat bars

Season
Year round

Race formats
BMX Racing and BMX Freestyle

Modern Mountain Biking got its start in the late 1970s in Northern California and today serves as a popular form of recreation, as well as competition. Oftentimes mountain biking events are grouped together over a weekend or during festivals.

With fast-paced racing, tight turns, spectacular jumps and high risk, BMX Racing is an exciting spectator sport. In BMX Racing, the riders sprint around a track filled with bumps, jumps and banked turns. BMX Freestyle Park was added to the Olympic program for Tokyo 2020, and the riders perform a series of tricks for judges. For riders participating in the various Freestyle formats – Park, Flatland, Dirt, Miniramp, Street, Vert, and Big Air – it’s often a lifestyle as much as it is a competition.

GRAVEL RACING

Bike Style
Gravel bikes are typically a road bike with knobby tires. For many gravel events a mountain bike can be used.

Season
Spring, summer and fall

Race formats
Gravel racing is endurance riding over unsurfaced roads.

One of the fastest growing niches in cycling is gravel racing. It’s fun, provides a break from traffic and doesn’t cost much to get started. In fact, you can use what you already own, and with a few small adjustments you can hit the gravel at a race near you in no time.
All riders are classified according to age, and the ages are based on the rider’s “racing age” which is the age a rider is at the end of a calendar year. For example if your event is in May, but your birthday is not until October, your “racing age” is the age you will be on your birthday in October. The one exception to the rule is Cyclocross as the season extends from September through February — beyond the calendar year. For Cyclocross, racers the rider’s age is the age the rider is the year the season ends (in other words, a year older).

**YOUTH RIDERS:**
Riders with a racing age less than 9

**JUNIOR RIDERS:**
Riders with a racing age between 9 and 18

For Youth and Junior riders there are NO categories – only age groups and gender. Once a racer becomes 18, they generally race based on skill and experience level (categorized racing) rather than age group.

Youth and Junior riders are also subject to gearing restrictions. More detail on Junior gearing restrictions can be found in Junior Rules on page 19. In general, a Youth or Junior racer has a bike outfitted with special gearing. The restrictions are based on the rider’s age. Such gearing prevents the rider from pushing a gear too hard — reducing chances of injury. The gearing restriction is not required for Mountain Bike or Cyclocross events.
TIPS FOR RIDING ON THE ROAD AND THE FIRST GROUP RIDE

Even if your primary cycling discipline is not Road cycling, you may find yourself riding on the road. It’s important to understand that regardless of whether you are riding in a group or alone, there are certain things to stay aware of.

First and foremost, we do not recommend riding alone, but if you do, ride with caution.

• Make sure you inform a parent or guardian where you are riding and when you expect to return.
• Keep your cell phone with you and keep it charged.
• Consider enrolling in GPS programs that allow others to see where you are during your ride. Examples of these are types of systems are SPOT, Trax, or Lezyne Trak.
• Wear bright colored and reflective clothing.
• Make sure your bike has working front and rear lights, and the rear light should blink.
• Do not roll through puddles of water regardless of how fun it may appear, you have no idea of what is underneath the water or how deep it is.

Riding with a group is fun, great training and safer than riding alone. A few things you should know about group riding etiquette:

• Be a safe rider. Remember your actions or reactions on the bike affect everyone around you.
• Stay alert.
• Do not use your cell phone, change clothes while riding, or do anything that might make you less stable in the group.
• Maintain your place in the pace line; don’t overlap the wheel in front of you.
• Know the expectation of the ride, is it a no drop or fast paced. Make sure your skill and fitness level match other riders in the group.

• Remember you are sharing the road. Stay in bike lanes where possible, signal at intersections, and don’t ride on sidewalks.
• Be aware of parked cars – especially if there is someone in the driver’s side as they could unexpectedly open their car door in front of you.
• Be courteous when overtaking runners, pedestrians and other riders or walkers – let them know you are there and are coming.

• Be prepared – have your own flat repair kit and know how to change a tire. Make sure you have adequate nutrition – water and food – to complete the ride safely.
• Show up to the ride on time; never late. It is not fair to expect everyone to wait for you.
Everyone is a first-timer at least once. Here are some quick tips to consider as you prepare for your first race:

Set a goal: For many first-timers, this can be as simple as completing the race. Maybe you have a finish time in mind. Remember to set a reasonable goal for yourself, after all, simply taking the first step by signing up for a race and showing up to the start line is a solid goal!

Practice nutrition: Train with the same sport drink and food or snacks you plan on having on race day – both pre-race and anything you consume during the race. Race day nerves can upset even the most ironclad stomachs. Racing with what your body is used to will help prevent an upset stomach during the event. Popular in-race food and drink include sports drinks, bananas, energy bars and gels, and granola bars. And staying hydrated is important – make sure to drink lots of fluids leading up to, during, and after a race.

Allow extra time race morning: Show up to the race venue with plenty of time to check in, warm up, and get ready to RIDE!

Don’t be afraid to ask questions: The event crew, volunteers and fellow competitors know what it is like to race for the first time. Ask questions, they will be happy to help!

Prepare race gear in advance: Getting your gear together a few days before the race is a great way to ease your mind and eliminate some of the pre-race stress. Take your bike to a local shop and have them take a look at it. Knowing your equipment is ready will help you have a better start on race day.

Don’t try anything new on race day: This goes for nutrition, clothing, and equipment.

Relax, have fun and enjoy your day!!

I ride bikes because it gives me freedom — freedom to go outside, see new places, and meet new people. It’s hard, it’s fast and there is nothing else like it. That’s why I ride bikes.

HUNTER WILSON, GS ANDIAMO CYCLING CLUB
España es diferente, pero algunas cosas son generalmente las mismas a lo largo de las disciplinas y niveles de competencia. Antes de llegar al lugar, lee la guía del evento si se proporciona y familiarízate con el recorrido y el horario.

CHECK-IN:
Cuando llegues al recinto, insígnifícate en la mesa de registro. Un miembro del personal o un voluntario verificará si tienes una licencia de carreras anual o necesitas comprar una tarjeta de acceso a un evento. Para los eventos del Campeonato Nacional, los ciclistas deben tener una licencia anual y un UCI ID*. Luego recibirás tu número de carrera y cualquier instrucción última. Si no te has pre-inscrito, también puedes registrarte y pagar los impuestos de inscripción en el momento de la verificación.

*UCI ID: Para competir en un Campeonato Nacional de USA Cycling, los ciclistas deben tener su fecha de nacimiento, género y ciudadanía o estatus de residente verificados. Una vez que se ha verificado esta información, se le otorga un UCI ID gratuito. Si no se muestra el UCI ID en tu licencia, accede a tu cuenta “Mi Cuenta” de USA Cycling y busca la opción de tu archivo y log lo e-mail o fax (719-434-4300) a USA Cycling.

Dependiendo del tipo de evento, puedes necesitar fijar tu número de carrera en tu camiseta. El número debe fijarse de manera que sea fácilmente visible y legible para un oficial del evento. La ilustración a continuación muestra la forma correcta de fijar un número:

Number Placement
Numbers shall not be cut, folded, or otherwise altered. Altering a number, covering or bad placement may result in fines and lack of results.

TIME TRIAL:
A single number should be placed, low and centered on the back of the rider’s jersey.

ROAD RACE AND CRITERIUM:
Numbers shall be placed so as to be seen from the sides by the officials and the photo-finish camera above the finish line.

BIKE FRAME NUMBERS WILL BE SUPPLIED AND ARE REQUIRED.

For some events (Mountain Bike, Gran Fondo, Gravel Grinders) you will be provided a race number place card to affix to your handle bars with ties provided by the event organizer. Some events may require you pin a number on and have a handle bar mounted place card.
WARM-UP:
Arrive with enough time to warm up before your event. This could involve a short ride off the course, using a bike trainer, or pre-riding the course as is done in a Cyclocross or Mountain Bike race. Make sure to be back with time to line up before the start.

RACE DAY NUTRITION:
Before the start check to see your hydration bottles/systems are full and any race nutrition is ready to go – snacks, bars, gels, etc. Some races include a “Feed Zone” where parents, volunteers, coaches or your teammates can pass water and other food to you. Understand the Feed Zone is the ONLY area on the course where you can receive this kind of assistance. Remember to ride slowly and carefully in and out of the Feed Zone – rushed riders who are not paying attention to the activity happening around them can cause problems for other riders which could result in an accident. And, make sure you’re drinking enough fluids – it will lead to a better performance and better experience.

STAY POSITIVE AND HAVE FUN!
Sometimes things will not go as planned during a race. Mechanical issues, a flat tire, “bonking” due to lack of proper fueling or preparation, and a crash can all impact your race. No race day is perfect and absolutely everyone makes mistakes. The best riders take stock of what happened on race day, learn from it, and plan their next event. The more you race, the better you will become, so stick with it, embrace the good with the bad and remember racing is supposed to be FUN!
RACE DAY CHECK LIST

Source Bike Racing for Juniors, Dieffenbach/McCauley (2008)

BUILD A RACE BAG:
- Copy of your Race License – accessible via the USA Cycling mobile app
- Health insurance card
- Important numbers
- Safety pins
- Spare clean water bottle
- Any medications
- Dry T-shirt
- Towel
- Plastic bags for wet, dirty clothes
- Repair kit (tubes, patches, CO2 cartridges, multi-tool and tire changing tools, chain lube)
- Waterproof sunscreen
- Chamois cream

RACE DAY:
- Team jersey and/or race kit
- Helmet
- Gloves
- Socks
- Shoes
- Race day nutrition
- Food for before and after the event
- Glasses and spare lenses
- Rain jacket
- Arm/leg/knee warmers
- Warm jacket and hat for warm up
- Garmin or other GPS tracking device
- After race bag:
  - Dry change of clothes
  - Towel
  - Cell phone

USAC racing is fun and challenging. My friends and I enjoy competing and becoming better mountain bikers because pushing ourselves and each other makes us all better athletes. Setting our goals on competing in US Nationals and World Cup is exciting. If we focus on our passion and work hard at our goals with the support of great teammates we can accomplish more than we ever imagined. I am super-stoked to compete in more USA Cycling races, and internationally, in the coming years.

RAINER ORTKIESE, GEORGIA
At an early age, some riders show signs of potential future success in cycling — possibly dreaming of becoming a member of the USA Cycling National Team and representing the U.S. on the international stage. USA Cycling has a team of coaches and elite athletic directors who select and train the athletes to be part of elite teams. For more information on how to be considered for the team please visit usacycling.org.

Athletes can qualify for the USA Cycling National Team through performances on the biggest stages in cycling — Olympic Games, World Championships, UCI WorldTour Road cycling events, and World Cups.
Participating in a USA Cycling National Championship can be a life changing experience for a young rider. In general, a Junior rider can participate in a National Championship if:

- they hold a valid Junior USA Cycling Race license with UCI ID.
- they are older than 16, they must be a U.S. citizen and have a U.S. racing nationality.
- their racing age is at least 11 years old (see Junior rules above).
- they race in their respective age group, gender – they may be subject to category restrictions* 

* Each National Championship event is a bit different and depending discipline and race format, requirements for participation will change. For more comprehensive eligibility requirements review the eligibility requirements for the National Championship you are most interested in: www.usacycling.org/events/national-championships
If you are a college-bound high school junior or senior, consider joining a collegiate team or club.

Collegiate cycling is a fully integrated division of USA Cycling, with specific licenses available to collegiate athletes for exclusive use in collegiate races. USA Cycling provides racing opportunities for collegiate riders in Track, Mountain Bike, Cyclocross, BMX, and Road in 11 conferences nationwide, with National Championships occurring annually for each discipline.

Elite racing experience or abilities are not required to be on a collegiate cycling team or club. Many students join an on-campus club to be part of a broader collegiate cycling community. Alumni often feel collegiate cycling was one of their most memorable experiences during college.

More information on USA Cycling’s Collegiate Program can be found at www.usacycling.org/college.

I started bike racing when I was 15 on a Junior development team. When I started looking at colleges, I knew that continuing to ride was important to me. I selected a college that had high academic standards and a cycling team. When I look back at my collegiate cycling experience, it was one of the best times of my life!

JUSTIN EVANS, USA CYCLING RACING OPERATIONS MANAGER AND UCI INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE COMMISSAIRE.
SafeSport

USA Cycling is committed to creating a safe and positive environment for its participants’ physical, emotional, and social development and promoting an environment free from misconduct and abuse. To achieve this, USA Cycling’s SafeSport Program went into effect in January 2014.

We all play a role in reducing misconduct in sport. Six primary examples of misconduct are: bullying, harassment, hazing, emotional misconduct, sexual misconduct, and physical abuse.

In 2017, Congress passed the Protecting Young Victims From Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act. The Act authorizes the U.S. Center for SafeSport to develop training, policies and procedures to prevent abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse of any amateur athlete. Training is required to be completed by certain adults; and, subject to parental consent, is required to be offered and given to minor athlete members.

SafeSport Training is available at no cost to members and affiliates of USA Cycling.

In addition to the core training, there are also age-specific courses, including:

• SafeSport Training for Parents
• High School
• Middle School
• Grades 3-5
• Grades K-2
• Preschool

More detailed information regarding USA Cycling’s SafeSport Program, including downloadable resources and avenues for reporting misconduct, can be found here.

Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policy (MAAPP)

Establishing clear boundaries reduces the risk of physical, sexual, and emotional misconduct, as well as bullying, harassment, and hazing. Furthermore, the majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated in isolated, one-on-one situations. By reducing such interactions between children and adults, programs reduce the risk of child sex abuse. However, one-on-one time with trusted adults is also healthy and valuable for a child.

Policies concerning one-on-one interactions protect children while allowing for these beneficial relationships. USA Cycling’s MAAPP can be reviewed here and we encourage all parents/guardians to be familiar with the policies.

CLEAN SPORT AND #IRIDECLEAN

The use of banned substances is against the rules of sport. It undermines the principles which make participating in sport worthwhile and is one of the most common concerns among USA Cycling’s membership. That is why USA Cycling is collaborating with riders, teams, Race Directors and local associations, as well as the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), Cycling Anti-Doping Foundation (CADF/UCI) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to deter doping at every level of the sport. All athletes deserve a level playing field and sense of fairness in their competition.

Established in 2013 and revamped in 2016, the RaceClean Program funds anti-doping tests at both the elite and amateur levels of cycling. The program utilizes the testing resources of USADA, which employs sophisticated methods to test professional and amateur athletes across a wide range of sports. The program also utilizes USADA for adjudicating cases and implementing penalties. The goal of the RaceClean program is to create a level playing field from the grassroot to elite levels of cycling.

#irideclean – Steve Tilford Fund

USA Cycling is excited to launch a new campaign inspired by Steve Tilford’s passion and vision for empowering Junior cyclists to ride clean. 2020 will see a commitment to presenting critical anti-doping information at all major events on the Junior calendar. Education sessions will be offered to both riders and their support networks (e.g., parents, coaches, etc.) with a vision for empowering riders to make informed choices in cycling and to race clean. By taking a proactive approach to supporting clean cyclists, we are creating a community actively engaged in promoting clean sport. Keep an eye out for #irideclean at an event near you!
Junior gearing can be a surprise to young athletes trying the sport of cycling for the first time. The young rider attending their first USA Cycling-sanctioned event may be shocked to find their bicycle deemed illegal. Parents may also wonder why this is so, especially when they have paid a lot of money for a bicycle they were told was race-ready.

The main purpose of Junior gear restrictions is to help the young rider develop a good pedal cadence and to avoid injury. Junior gear restrictions also level the playing field for developing Juniors who may be at a disadvantage against rivals who possess physical advantages such as height and power.

The test to see if a race bike is legal or not is called the “rollout method” or simply “Junior rollout,” which is the distance a bike travels backward in a straight line through one full pedal revolution when the bicycle is in its largest gear. The Junior gear restriction for road events is 26 feet (7.93 meters).

To calculate how far a bike will travel relative to its gears, USA Cycling determines gear ratios with respect to race age and discipline and applies in all events in that discipline. There is no restriction for Cyclocross or mountain bike races. For road and track the limits are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GEAR RESTRICTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROAD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-18</td>
<td>7.93 meters (26')(52x14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>6.93 meters (22'9&quot;) (50x15) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>6.45 meters (21'2&quot;) (50x16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>6.05 meters (19'10 1/4&quot;) (52x17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRACK</td>
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<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
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* Note the gear ratios listed are merely suggestions because of wheel and tire combinations. The distance rolled out is the governing standard.

** For 15 & 16-year-old Juniors who are competing in keirin or Madison championship events, the 17-18 (unrestricted) gear limit applies.

Race officials usually provide a courtesy gear check prior to the start of a Junior race, but it is the gear check immediately after the Junior race that determines whether a Junior’s bicycle is legal or not.

The official checks a Junior’s bicycle gears not by counting the number of teeth on the largest chain ring and smallest cassette cog, but by rolling the bicycle backward in a straight line for 26 feet. If the bicycle travels 26 feet or less when rolled backward one full pedal revolution, the bicycle is legal. If the bicycle rolls past 26 feet, the rider is disqualified for not complying with the Junior gear restriction.

Ultimately, it is the athlete’s responsibility to make sure their bicycle is compliant with Junior gear restrictions. The purpose of the courtesy check is to offer the Junior the opportunity to block their gears prior to competing in their event. Note that blocked gearing is not permitted at USA Cycling National Championships, certain selection events for international competition, or UCI events.

Depending upon the rear derailleur’s stop limits and rear cassette cog combination, there is no guarantee a bicycle with blocked gearing can be made legal, since it all comes down to the distance traveled in the largest accessible gear. Blocking means adjusting the rear derailleur’s high stop limit screw to prevent the chain from going to a small rear cassette cog.

It is also important to note that not all cycling tires have the same diameter, which can give a bicycle a rollout distance different than the distance provided by the gear recommendation.

Junior riders need to roll out their bicycles on their own prior to attending a USA Cycling-sanctioned event to determine whether they will be compliant with the rules.
Questions abound if you’re raising a child who races bikes. When is it okay to tackle a century? Should we hire a coach? If my child works with a coach, what’s my job?

Fortunately you’re not searching for answers in a vacuum. Experts with years of hands-on experience working with Junior cyclists can address these questions as well as topics like motivational support, challenges girls face, pacing, and perhaps most importantly, how you can best help.

What’s my role?
When you’re waking up at 5 a.m. to trundle your kid off to local races every weekend and conversation revolves around cycling, it’s easy to lose sight of the big picture.

“The bottom line is you’re not raising a bike racer; you’re raising a kid, someone who is going to be an adult,” says Kristen Dieffenbach, who has a Ph.D. in exercise science. Currently on the faculty at West Virginia University, she is also a consultant and coach who specializes in working with Junior and Espoir elite athletes.

“Ultimately, you want to think about how being a bike racer is going to help a child be a better person, not just a better bike racer.”

Parents should use the sport to help pave the path to well-balanced adulthood. For example, learning how to accept a mistake and move forward serves a kid for decades whether or not he continues cycling.

Setting a budget for the season teaches discipline and money smarts. Ask your child which events matter most; discuss what’s involved financially to attend them and procure equipment. When they are ready to gain their independence, the cost of the sport won’t come as an unmanageable shock.

Help your child stay grounded in reality by maintaining expectations around family chores and other responsibilities instead of deferring them for single-minded focus on cycling. Dieffenbach points to swimmer Janet Evans who continued to take out the trash at home after she earned an Olympic gold medal at age 17. Evans became one of the greatest female swimmers the world’s ever seen.

How do I fit in?
In addition to supervising the overall well-being of young athletes, a parent’s job is to provide unconditional love and support. When your child works with a coach, Dieffenbach advises focusing conversation about racing and training on what they’re doing rather than giving your opinion or critiquing. That’s the coach’s job.

Generally a coach is tasked with driving performance by training the athlete to reach their highest potential and identifying areas for improvement. The role might vary somewhat based on the athlete’s and parent’s needs. Parents should participate in seasonal planning with the coach since they manage expenses.

Parents best motivate younger to middle-age Juniors by being present and positive

Kids who belong to a team also receive direction from adults who are team managers and/or coaches. At Team Rokform, an Orange County, California club with one of the country’s strongest development programs for Juniors age 9 to 18, a team manager guides 15 to 18 year-old riders in the elite program.
According to Jeff Shein, Rokform’s Junior team coordinator, the team manager supplies race day strategy, education in racing tactics, and helps athletes learn how to work together to reach the podium. Parents should leave racing instruction to the team manager.

What’s motivational?
Shein believes parents best motivate younger to middle-age Juniors by being present and positive. Get to races. Cheer without criticizing. “I can’t tell you the number of parents that yell as the kid goes by, ‘Move up!’ The kid knows that,” he says.

And if a race goes poorly? It’s bound to happen for newcomers; even if they out-pedal everyone on a group ride, they can’t be expected to win their first races. “Don’t belittle or say negative things. Try instead, ‘Hey that was a tough race,’ and think of something positive that happened.”

Shein likes to see the youngest cyclists’ parents actively involved in the club by participating in rides and helping at events. At this point fun should be the focus, he says. Ambitious plans are usually pre-mature.

“I saw it in little league baseball too. A lot of parents think their kid will be the next slugger in the major leagues. It’s nice to dream, but don’t keep so much pressure on your kid. I’ve seen parents push so hard and the kid ends up getting burned out on the sport and moves on to something else.”

Kids progress at different speeds. If a young Junior jumps into the sport and then shows less interest, it could mean it’s time for a break or they’ve done too much too soon. Dieffenbach notes that hyper-focus on becoming exceptional before a child is emotionally, physically, and mentally ready to advance actually causes a lot of kids who could become very good a few years later – maybe even elite – to drop out of cycling before age 18.

A parent who found cycling as an adult and is extremely passionate about it may forget that a widening teenage world opens up many new possibilities. “Keep cycling fun and enjoyable so that they can keep doing it, but give them enough autonomy to explore a little bit what it means to do some other things,” Dieffenbach suggests.

How do I help my daughter?
In their typically very small local fields, girls place well pretty quickly. So facing more competition can end in a disappointing reality check. Dieffenbach says preparing them to handle that doesn’t have to require frequent travel to bigger races.

She suggests girls pursue other interests and not specialize in cycling until their mid-teen years. Non-cycling activities will demonstrate what it takes to succeed in bigger pools of talent.
and highlight the smaller realm of competitive cycling. Then before going to national cycling championships, parent and daughter can discuss what racing there will entail.

Additionally, connecting girls with talented women racers can help them feel less isolated. Look for positive women that have healthy approaches to eating, racing, and life balance and understand their responsibility as role models.

For girls as well as boys, “It really comes down to making sure your child’s sense of who they are is bigger than their wins or their success in bike racing, that they take pride in and feel good about the other things they accomplish, as well as the work they put in [on the bike] and training they do,” Dieffenbach says.

Is my child doing too much?

Dieffenbach cautions against adult level activity for children while they inhabit developing bodies. Junior gear restrictions, which apply to road and track events, are in place for a good reason that she says we often forget. “Developing knees, hips, bones, and legs shouldn’t push really heavy gears. It’s not good for them.”

Decisions about whether or not your child should attempt a century or a popular gravel race should account for training age, physical growth age, and emotional maturation age, Dieffenbach advises. “Chronological age doesn’t tell us much. It’s a complex picture which means you have to know them, get outside consulting help.”

Weigh the same factors when considering whether to enter kids into longer adult races. Shein hesitates with younger Juniors, “unless they have the absolute skill levels and physical size to not be intimidated by a bunch of adults,” but encourages older Juniors to consider it.

Of course a child’s input regarding their next step in cycling is important. But if they’re overstretching themselves, a parent needs to set limits. For these types of decisions a parent can also seek advice one-on-one from a coach.

A general guideline for where your child should be in their cycling “journey” is included below. It’s important to understand that a girl’s move at a different pace than a boy’s.

Is it time for a coach?

Deciding when to hire a coach is “a very individual thing,” Dieffenbach indicates. First, outline what you need from this expert. Initially you might hire a coach if a younger rider has outgrown pedaling with you and needs a safe riding partner.

A more seasoned athlete could benefit from a coach if they want one, is intensifying training or racing, and possesses the maturity and discipline to work directly with an advisor and follow a plan. USA Cycling maintains a list of licensed coaches, and parents should interview candidates and discuss their approach. See also SafeSport guidelines for parents considering a coach.

When a coach comes on board, easing back from providing performance advice can be challenging for parents. Clear communication, the foundation for a productive parent-Junior-coach relationship, will help. Dieffenbach suggests asking for the coach’s assistance in transitioning to a supportive parent role, as well as alerting the athlete to your new role, describing it, and asking what they need.

“It is a great time to practice the shift that occurs as a child grows up, from directive to supportive parent. If you slip back, recognize it, own it, and move on.”

IN CLOSING

Remember, cycling can be a fun way for you and your family to enjoy being outside and exercising. That can lead to a more competitive path and even elite level competition. Let’s help shape the sport of cycling together!
The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) is the national anti-doping organization (NADO) in the United States for Olympic, Paralympic, Pan American, and Parapan American sport. (usada.org)

The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) is the worldwide governing body for cycling. (uci.org)

The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee serves as both the National Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee for the United States. (teamusa.org)