



LOSE THE TRAINING WHEELS™

Parent Information

Camp Introduction

This document is provided for the purpose of informing parents about the *Lose the Training Wheels Program*, its objectives and format. Our objective is to be able to provide a bicycle riding environment utilizing specialized equipment as well as coaching and encouragement. Our central focus is to permit children to ride conventional bikes without training wheels who would otherwise be relegated to staying on training wheels, standing by, riding a tandem, or riding what we regard to be cumbersome special purpose bikes and tricycles. Consequently, we work primarily with those children who possess certain basic attributes, such as being ambulatory, having use of all limbs, with adequate vision to see and avoid obstacles, and most importantly, the desire to lose the training wheels. Most children enrolling are those capable of riding bikes with training wheels, albeit with some difficulty or hesitation. Children with more severe challenges such as requiring wheelchairs and walkers, or being blind, for example, are possibly best served by seeking other therapy options. In the cases when a child is able to master a two-wheeler, "the least restrictive environment," has been achieved in our view. We have had demonstrated success with children with varied disabilities and challenges. Age ranges typically are from eight to eighteen. Some variations from this age range can be permitted on a case-by-case basis.

If a child is to be able to learn to ride a bike, the primary ingredient or prerequisite is that the child must want to ride a bike. If a child refuses to get on a bike, any bike, even one of our stable adapted trainers, then there is scant chance that the child will master bike-riding skills. The child must have the internal desire, and not merely be the reluctant participant based on the parent's expectations and desires. Yes, parents can help and provide encouragement, but if the child has a firm resistance to undertaking the first step, typically putting on a helmet and then trying out a first level trainer under the supervision of one of our staff, that child won't learn until and unless we overcome the reluctance.

We take it as a given that the child being enrolled, possibly your child, has been unsuccessful in the past in attempts to lose the training wheels, and that a variety of reasons may have been responsible for that lack of success. We at *Lose the Training Wheels Program* have devoted years of university level research to prepare us to work with children with reluctance and outright fear as well as physical and cognitive limitations. A core group of researchers, mostly university professors as well as adapted physical education specialists, has published some results, and we continue to document and make our findings and techniques known so that more children might benefit.

The *Lose the Training Wheels Program* uses a special design of bicycle, which we refer to as an adapted bike trainer. In reality, our therapy utilizes a progression of trainer bikes. The children typically start riding on ultra-stable trainer bikes and then progress towards what we can call normal bikes – a conventional bike without those dreaded training wheels. These

bikes are of our own design, and are handcrafted on a custom basis in our own shops. Our trainer bikes aren't available for rent or sale, as the adapted trainers are intended primarily as stepping-stones for use in a clinical format so as to allow children to graduate onto conventional bikes. By utilization of a clinic format, the adapted trainers, although expensive and intricate to custom build, are used over and over again by numerous children and thus the costs of the therapy per child are held within bounds. We are Quixotian researchers seeking to bring about the realization of a dream – the dream of empowering children with special needs to ride bikes. The other reality is that specialized therapy involving specialized equipment is not cheap. Yes, most clinics opt to charge a modest tuition fee, but such fees typically fall short, and significantly so, in meeting our customary operating expenses. Most *Lose the Training Wheels Program* clinics require substantial donations, both monetary as well as donated use of facilities, volunteers, staff, and administrative support.

We believe that the therapy – enabling children with special needs to master bike riding – has a host of benefits. Self-esteem, peer inclusion, improved health, and improved physical enjoyments are but a few.

Learning to ride a bike for children with special needs isn't always simple. If a child has been unsuccessful in previous attempts, there are often underlying causes. The specific causes vary, but can include physical limitations, cognitive delay, improper equipment, improper instructional technique, and improper practice environment – or a combination. Moreover, even the previous attempts, especially if they resulted in falls or injury, at times contribute additional hurdles that must be overcome – as the child's fear and apprehension factors have intensified.

Program Format Information

We want the parent to be as informed as possible, so with that in mind we present the following information for consideration –

Time Tables. Learning to ride a bike involves learning a sequence of skills and ultimately being able to execute multiple skills in a coordinated manner. Each child will learn on his/her own timetable. Some children can learn in an hour, and yet others require more time. A full week of the program is often sufficient for many children. Because of the need to be fresh and rested as well as other limitations, we find that children do best when we schedule a daily riding session not to exceed 1 1/4 hours (75 minutes). Your child will be assigned to a session or time slot, as we typically run a number of sessions each day of the clinic. We don't watch the clock, but rather watch to see that the child makes improvement – step-by-step, or pedal-by-pedal, if you wish.

End Outcomes. We strive as hard as feasible to bring every child along to be able to become an independent bike rider, but we don't have 100 percent success. The outcome is not anything that we can guarantee. We do guarantee to do our best in terms of providing the best equipment, staff, support, and attention to detail.

Immersion in Bicycling. Once your child starts participation in our program, they will ride our special trainer bikes and continue to ride such bikes under our supervision. We ask that you refrain from going home at night and getting out the old training wheels. Let the child bike with us exclusively for the duration of our program.

One Skill at a Time. A common bit of advice that golf pro's have is to learn to play golf, and don't try taking tennis lessons at the same time. In short, biking involves learning a new

physical skill. Learning a new physical skill involves a process where the brain patterns and reflexes are encoded, and thus become more akin to reflexes as opposed to conscious acts. This encoding process evolves as the skill is practiced, thereby becoming "learned." In the case of learning to ride a bike, we have to permit time to encode a number of skills, and then allow the learner to become graceful and coordinated as skills are combined and executed. Please try to avoid cramming in other classes or clinics such as horseback riding, ballet, baseball, swimming, or soccer. If the child already knows a skill such as soccer and then wants to play, that is fine, but don't schedule lessons that overlap with the *Lose the Training Wheels Program*.

Appropriate Dress. Biking is a physical activity for which dress needs to be appropriate. In general, avoid dresses and baggy clothes that restrict movement or get stuck on seats and in bike spokes and chains. Knee length pants are fine, along with short-sleeved shirts in warmer weather. If it is colder, then longer length is okay, but avoid floppy and baggy clothing. Shoes should be suitable for pedaling a bike, so avoid clogs and sandals, or dangling shoelaces. If your child wears corrective lenses, consider a plastic holder such as athletes wear so glasses stay on. Lastly, girls should have a hairstyle conducive to wearing a helmet; so avoid braids, pigtails, and especially pigtails held in place by beads. Hair beads and helmets don't mix.

Helmets and Other "Equipment." Each child is expected to arrive with a suitable biking helmet, provided in advance by the parent. Children without helmets, or children refusing to wear helmets, will not be allowed to get on bikes while in our program. Consider purchasing that helmet from a bike shop – as the reputable bike shop will work with you to achieve proper adjustment. An ill-fitted bargain helmet is not a bargain should an accident occur. Bicyclists wear helmets for a reason, and one of them isn't to save a few dollars at a discount store. Please pay attention to getting and properly fitting a helmet for your child. If your child requires special equipment such as ankle or leg braces for treatment of CP, for example, or a weighted vest for helping with sensory integration tendencies, please so note on the application and bring these items.

Siblings. Your child's siblings are adorable by any standard, but we ask that you refrain from allowing them to be present or to interfere with the bicycling therapy. In short, we can't focus on your child if a sibling is nearby demanding equal attention, getting onto our bikes, or even creating a fuss. In certain circumstances the presence of siblings is desirable, such as for offering encouragement and support to the child with special needs, but we will ask in those cases.

Bringing Your Child's Bike. In the *Lose the Training Wheels Program* we will provide all bikes including the one that you child will initially ride on – that first two-wheeler. Please leave your bike at home until asked by the staff to bring it in. When you do bring in your bike, our staff will examine your bike and offer comments regarding suitability, needed adjustments, or possibly selection criteria for a more suitable bike. If your child does not yet have a bike, we suggest that you refrain from buying a bike until we can work with your child and better advise you as to what might be appropriate. We will try to take into account availability, your child's skill level, your budget considerations, and esthetics.

Photo and Liability Releases. Photography is used as a part of the evaluation of the progress of each child, notably video-taping. Still pictures are also taken. These visual and sound images are central to document progress and for promotional purposes. The parent or guardian will be asked to consent to the taking of photographic images, sound images, and as well anecdotal information. These images and records are used internally for proper

operation of the program as well as externally as related to publications in research journals, media coverage, program development, and program promotion. If you elect to not grant such consent, then your child will most likely be photographed anyway – as we can't stop the proliferation of tiny cameras, such as in cell phones, and somebody (like some parent or grandparent of another child) will be taking a picture at some point that has your child in the photo. Our program is a group setting, and we don't give private lessons. In cases when parents give photographic consent, please be advised that our usage of any photographic and sound images, the child's name, and the clinical details will be in a professional manner and intended to promote and advance the program. In a similar vein, all parents/guardians enrolling children will be expected to sign a liability release form that also includes a medical emergency treatment clause.

The Drop-Off Clinic Format. The *Lose the Training Wheels Program* is at times conducted with parents not on the premises or otherwise interfering with the therapy. We ask that you arrive with your child in advance of his/her scheduled time, wait with the child until we are ready to start the therapy, and then leave or at least stay out of visible sight of the child. If the gymnasium or other clinic riding area affords a removed viewing area for you to watch, that is fine, such as from behind a glass window, but we ask that you not be visibly present when your child is with us. The parent is encouraged to use the available time for personal respite. In certain circumstances, we find it helpful to bring parents in, such as to assist with behavior problems or other needs, but we will ask in those cases. Please ask if you have concerns, but please respect our need to work one-on-one with your child. Certain children do better if an aide accompanies the child, such as to assist with focus, behavior management, and other issues. If you feel that an aide's presence or your presence is important and available, please discuss this at the time of registration.

Being Touched. Bicycling involves a physical activity on moving equipment. It is inevitable that circumstances will arise when one or more of our staff or volunteers will physically touch, hold, or even grab your child. This often occurs as we place feet on pedals, or lift a chin to improve forward vision, or place a hand on the back to increase pedaling speed, or to catch a child who might be falling. These activities occur in a public setting and are for therapy purposes. If you object to your child being touched, you are strongly advised to not enroll your child.

Snacks and Beverages. As a matter of expediency, the staff of the *Lose the Training Wheels Program* normally does not provide snacks or bottled beverages. Water from a fountain or large dispenser with disposable cups will be available. The parent may elect to send a snack, some fruit, and drink, such as in a backpack or tiny cooler. Beverages should be restricted to water in a non-breakable screw lid plastic bottle. Please do not send soda and other sticky beverages as we are typically in a gymnasium area. We find that many children enjoy taking a break periodically for a "drink" and some rest before resuming bicycling. The breaks are helpful and contribute to the therapy. We frequently use the break periods to socialize, compliment, and encourage the children.

Participation and "Getting Along." Our *Lose the Training Wheels Program* is predicated on creation of a social setting where we work with children in groups. There are many reasons why we have found this to be effective, as we can achieve better utilization of physical equipment, staff and volunteer assignments can be adjusted to meet on-going needs, kids enjoy peers once they become used to the social setting, and role models are present. In a group setting, other children will be engaged in similar bike related activities, and kids are more motivated to want to learn in a social setting. Should your child, or any child, become disruptive or otherwise refuse to participate, we will make a reasonable effort to work with the

child to overcome any problems or fears, but if it is determined by our staff that the child's refusal or behavior is unproductive as well as possibly harmful to the progress of others, we will ask the child to discontinue participation in the program.

Graduation Day. On the last day of the clinic, Friday April 6th, we will allocate a time for parents, family, and guests to come in to join the program and to help celebrate the progress and successes. You will be provided with specific information.

References. Each of our *Lose the Training Wheels Program* clinics utilize trained professional staff as well as volunteers from the community. We are just at the initial stages of refining and publishing our methods and clinical anecdotal results in professional as well as popular journals. One article appeared in the October 2002 issue of *Exceptional Parent Magazine*, pp. 64-66. Another article appeared in the journal, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, August 2004. A dozen or more newspapers and media sources have featured our clinics and camps, as well as televised broadcasts in various cities. Feature stories have run in *People*, August 29, 2005, and in *Bicycling* magazine, December 2005. Richard Klein holds an earned doctorate from Purdue University (1969), and served as a faculty member in the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1968-1998). He has authored or co-authored approximately fifty professional publications and has formally presented before numerous learned societies. Dr. Klein's resume, list of publications, and professional references will be forwarded upon request; contact <r-klein@uiuc.edu>. Richard holds a United States Patent, as well as having been the recipient of numerous effective teaching awards while at the University of Illinois.

Want more information? There is a wealth of information about Lose the Training Wheels bike camps and bicycling science on the web at: <http://www.losethetrainingwheels.org>.