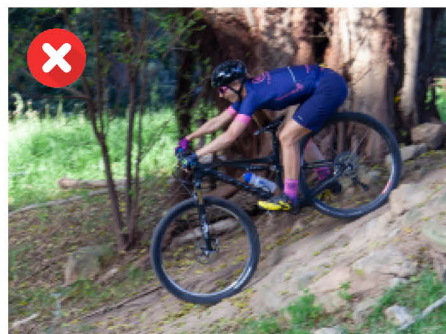


DROP-OFFS

Everyone used to say you should lean back, now this has changed – especially if you have a dropper seat post.

Approach the drop-off, check how it looks, bend your elbows deep and stay low. Then as your bike moves down and forward, your hips naturally slide back. You want to keep both wheels on the ground and equal pressure in your feet with heels dropped (unless you're jumping the drop-off). Imagine doing a push up, bend your arms and then extend while doing the drop off. Try to choose the safest line (it's always good to walk the drop-off first and choose where you want to go). If you decide to dismount, dismount towards the back wheel.

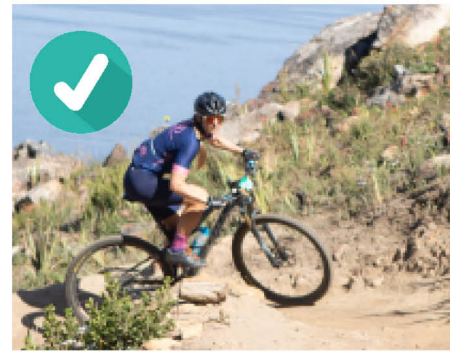


DON'T lean back too much – your body needs to be centred over the bike. If you lean too far back your front wheel can lose traction.

SWITCHBACKS

These are lots of people's nemesis! Yes, it does look scary sometimes, but with the right skills, commitment and mind set you can do it.

Again, it's good to practice in a safe environment around cones before you head to steep singletrack. Start with a wider turn and then make the turn tighter. Choose the outside line and look out of the corner and ahead of you.



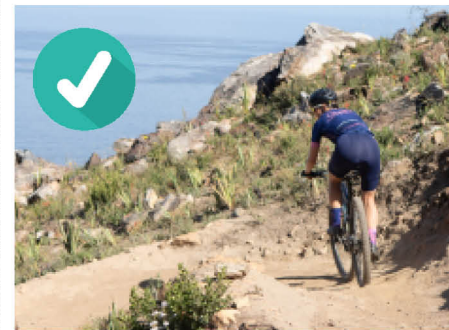
On uphill switchback, move your weight towards the front wheel, with bent arms and your chest towards the handlebars.



DON'T look into the corner of the turn, or into the trees, an obstacle or rock. If you do, you will end up in the corner or hitting that tree or rock.

On downhill switchback you go in a low ready position, and it's easier with a dropper seat post. Concentrate on heavy feet and looking through the turn with the whole body. Pointing the knees helps to look through the turn. Take the wide line. As you get out of the switchback get into ready position again.

DON'T take the inside line, you will not make the turn and will most likely fall.



HOW TO RAISE A LITTLE SHREDDER



GET YOUR KIDS COMFORTABLE to ride on flat surfaces first. Practice in the park or somewhere safe without cars. Get them to ride as often as you can so that their balance, confidence and stability is built gradually. Once they can pedal well without assistance show them how to stand up and practice neutral and ready position. Some kids get it very quickly, some need more time to master this.

A FEW KEY POINTS

- Make sure their helmets are fitted properly. Often they're too loose or hanging way back.
- Small kids can have two fingers on their brakes as their fingers often can't reach. If you can, pull the brake levers closer towards the handlebar for one-finger brake lever grip.
- Buy kids bikes with shift levers rather than grip shifts as the latter become hard to pull once muddy or older.
- Let kids practice changing gears in a safe area before you hit the trails.
- A bike that's too big for them will make bike handling harder. Start on the smaller size and move onto a bigger size once they are comfortable.



This is a great way to show kids the neutral and ready position, with levelled feet and bent arms. **DON'T** let them look down on the front wheel – they need to look ahead to where they're going.



You can take kids on easy pump track and practice riding in circles but don't rush it if they are not confident and not comfortable in the ready position.

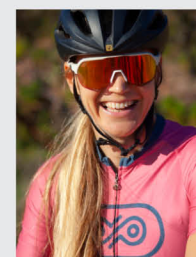
Take cones into the park and make them ride around them and practice their balance in slow drills. For example, how to ride holding with one hand, how to ride in a straight line, etc.

Once they've mastered the ready position you can take them on bumpier terrain and singletrack. Make it fun and don't push them too much to keep it cool. Pack some snacks or sweets to keep blood sugar stable. What's super easy for you can be pretty tiring for a five-year-old or even an unfit 10-year-old. Also, those bikes are heavy! You might need to give them a hand or push and encourage them going uphill.

The last thing you want to do is to push them onto too hard terrain too soon and spoil the experience for them for good. Gradually add time and features in your little rides. Make the rides short first and stop often to look around for animals and flowers they can spot so they enjoy the experience of being in nature.

Let them set the pace – you can practice track standing – but don't let them know it's super slow for you.

Each child is different and while your neighbour's kid may be super confident, yours might not be and might take longer to feel comfortable. Be patient! 🧠



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Slegrova is a cycling and strength coach and a BICP-certified MTB skills instructor. She has 15 years' experience training men, women and kids across the cycling disciplines. Her first love is mountain biking and she has completed three Absa Cape Epics (with a top 10 women's team finish in 2022), the Cape Pioneer Trek and Trans Alp, and held WP colours for XCM. Passionate about empowering people, and specifically women, she founded Pretty Pedal, a women's road and MTB club that offers a welcoming and safe environment to learn new skills and meet fellow cyclists.

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