

Balanceability

Helping active lifestyles



The journey starts here!



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The story so far

During a visit to Germany, my husband and I saw how widely balance bikes are used there, as they are in many other European countries. Paediatricians in Germany even use balance bikes as a way of assessing children's physical development. We bought a balance bike for our son, who was then just 2½, and we were astonished at how quickly he got the hang of it.

Back home, I began to look at what was happening here. I was horrified to discover that 42 per cent of six-year-olds in the UK could not ride a pedal bike. I realised that we were missing a trick. So much of the concern about obesity tries to tackle existing problems and to undo bad habits. But with balance bikes, very young children have the opportunity to adopt healthy, active habits as a routine part of daily life. They side-step obesity before it even becomes an issue.

**Balanceability launched in 2008.
We train people to deliver Balanceability
in their own schools and communities.**

We've also realised how important balance is for developing all kinds of skills, from fine and gross motor skills to hand-eye coordination and stimulating the vestibular system (see page 4 and page 5). Cycling is a great response to the obesity crisis, and we address this on page 14. And people working with children with special educational needs can see how to adapt the programme to offer opportunities to all children. Read more on page 15.

In early 2015, we were thrilled when East Sussex County Council decided to incorporate Balanceability into an initiative to improve physical activity; some 210 practitioners attended Balanceability training. Children from 130 Early Years settings around East Sussex now have access to balance bikes, which is

hugely rewarding for us. You can read about one teacher's experience of doing Balanceability training on page 11.

Finally, we are the only formally approved learn-to-cycle programme for very young children. See what our accrediting body (Association for Physical Education) says about us on page 6. One of their stringent criteria is that we take research and evaluation very seriously, and you can find out how we do that on page 7.

Our dream is to see more children on bikes, more families cycling for fun, leisure and travel as a matter of routine. If children can cycle, they have the chance to stay fit and active without even realising it. My own children abandoned balance bikes long ago – these days, they enjoy BMX and mountain biking, and they don't think twice about jumping on a bike to get around.

Cycling isn't just another skill. It isn't just about physical literacy, development, health outcomes or social benefits. It is a key to lifelong fun and opportunity, because cycling changes lives; it's that simple, and it's that profound.

Maria Yates,
Balanceability Director



**SEE
PAGE 18
FOR OUR
SPECIAL
OFFER**

Fun, safe and with benefits
that last a lifetime...

Balanceability is the UK's first and only formally approved 'learn to cycle' programme for children aged 2½ to six years old. We train teachers, cycle trainers, sports and leisure staff to deliver the programme to children in their own settings. We also offer high-quality balance bikes, resources and all the equipment you need to get children cycling.

Balance and physical literacy

Jump for joy

Children have a fundamental urge to play. Climbing trees, jumping on old tyres, skipping, somersaulting... these are all fun. Cycling, too, is intrinsically fun. When young children crack the skill of gliding on a balance bike, it's not unusual to hear a loud 'WHEEEEE!' of sheer delight. It's a feeling we can all identify with (some of us adults will even admit to the occasional 'WHEEEE!' when we're free-wheeling on a bike – and why not?).

Luckily, you'll never have to wait until then to see children thoroughly enjoying themselves. Long before children get their hands on any of your school's balance bikes, you'll get them doing a load of jumping, stepping and balancing games. It's never difficult to persuade children to join in; because you're simply encouraging them to do what comes naturally: finding that 'WHEEEEE' feeling.

It starts with movements such as jumping. We take jumping for granted but, in fact, it's a very complex movement. You first have to flex at the hips and knees to generate (and sense) the force of a rapid upward movement, then you have to straighten your hips and knees to get your feet to leave the ground.

At first, children don't have enough balance to leave the ground both feet at once, so the jump is more like a gallop. Later when they manage to get both feet to leave the ground at the same time, there is a brief and glorious hover in the air, before they land with both feet together.

If you watch carefully, you'll notice that the younger children in your school learn to jump in quite a predictable way. First, they'll practice jumping down from something (such as a kerb, or a stair). Then they'll jump up and down on the spot. The next phase is to jump forwards, and after that, they'll start practising jumping up on to something (a cushion, for example). Jumping backwards comes next and, finally, jumping over something.

Most children learn to jump at around 12-26 months old. Some take a bit longer, particularly if they're getting too much vestibular stimulation. This makes them feel as though they're at risk of losing their balance and falling over. The Balanceability equipment bag is full of things to help you encourage children of all abilities and confidence levels to develop their balance skills, particularly by jumping. Our instruction manual has got loads of ideas, too.

The other thing about jumping is that, like gliding on a balance bike, it is pure fun. We now know that the vestibular system is closely linked to happiness. If children feel happy, they jump and dance around. It works the other way, too: we get vestibular stimulation from activities such as jumping and dancing, and so doing these things makes us feel happy. In other words, jumping not only reflects how a child feels, it can also make them feel happy.

There's a really important social aspect to all this too, because as well as being a motor skill, jumping is one of the non-verbal ways we communicate how we feel.

So the next time you see a child jumping around, you'll understand exactly what they're telling you: "Hey! Look at me! I'm alive, and I'm happy, and I want you to know! WHEEEE!"

"Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of riding a bike".

John F. Kennedy



Vestibular Training



At Balanceability, we see many children who are naturally good at balancing; some find it so easy that they are gliding on a balance bike within a couple of hours, even if they've never sat on a bike before. Other children, however, struggle with their balance, sometimes to the extent that they even find standing on one leg challenging.

We notice that these children may be particularly cautious about how they move their bodies. They prefer sedentary games, small groups and more manageable spaces. This may have nothing to do with not wanting to get involved or being shy, however, but may be due to a relatively common phenomenon: a hypersensitive vestibular system.

The vestibular system coordinates movement with balance (see diagram). A child with a hypersensitive vestibular system finds it difficult to separate incoming sensory impressions. The messages to their brain tell them that they're at risk of losing their balance, even when there is only a very small risk of doing so. The child reacts accordingly, making exaggerated movements in response to what they experience as a risk of falling. This can have a huge impact on a child's willingness to take part in physical activities that challenge the vestibular system – somersaults, hopping, spinning, twisting, jumping and so on. They may avoid climbing frames, swings and roundabouts. No wonder these children are hesitant about riding a bike!

The problem is that if the child avoids such activities, the development of their motor skills can be impeded, which can affect many other parts of their learning and progress.

At Balanceability, we know that there is a lot that can be done to help, long before introducing the child to the bike. The idea is to get the child's body to react appropriately to a movement, acceleration or change of direction in order to maintain balance and stop it from over-reacting. We use activities that stimulate the vestibular system in a way that is controlled, safe and at the child's own pace.

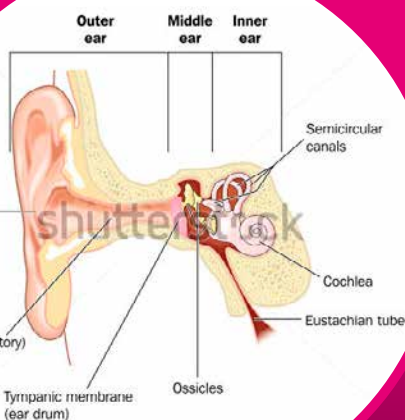
Try this exercise

Set up a short line of Balanceability Footprint shapes close together, to make a continuous line. (You can make the shapes overlap if the child has very small feet.) Ask the child to step along these, squeezing in as many short steps as they can before they reach the end. This makes the child focus on their feet, rather than on the end of the trail. Their sense of sight helps them to keep their balance. Focusing on feet like this also minimises the tendency to flail about with their arms if they do feel unsteady.

You can extend the exercise by getting the child to do the same thing, but walking along the Balanceability equipment called the 'River', a series of colourful pieces that join together to create a slightly raised walkway. A child will also often come up with their own idea about how to make the exercise more challenging (a plank set at a shallow angle, for example) so ask them for their ideas too. This means that they feel they have control over the activity and the level of difficulty.

The child's brain needs to recognise and learn to automate a movement so that it becomes more efficient and fluid, and so they need to perform the movement repeatedly. Over time, the child will realise that practice and repetition helps them become more proficient.

Vestibular stimulation training also increases self-confidence. Children who can rely on their vestibular system to give them accurate feedback about what their bodies are doing are more likely to take part in all kinds of physical activities, including cycling.



The vestibular system

The sensory system that controls our sense of balance and spatial coordination is called the vestibular system, located in the inner ear. The vestibular system has two parts: one part looks after linear accelerations, and the other responds to rotational movements. From moment to moment, the vestibular system sends signals to the eyes and to the muscles that keep us upright, coordinating movement with balance. A good working vestibular system is critical to being able to cycle: basically, it helps you move forward without wobbling.

afPE formal approval

Stamp of approval

No one has invested as much as we have to develop a learn-to-cycle programme that is so aligned to the needs of children in terms of achieving this important life skill, and we first gained formal approval in 2010, just a year or so after we launched.

Our accrediting body is the Association for Physical Education (afPE). The afPE supports people and organisations involved in PE, school sport and physical activity, and it provides clear and meticulous advice on safe practice, resources and professional learning that will raise standards.

Sue Wilkinson, CEO of afPE, says: "With every political party now recognising the importance of the Early Years in a child's development, it is imperative that schools invest wisely."

The afPE's Professional Development Board looks at organisations such as Balanceability and, if they fulfil its stringent requirements, formally approves them as providers. The afPE highlighted Balanceability as an exemplar of good practice and innovation. "The learn-to-cycle programme is based on thorough research, and its impact on a child's development is clearly evident," says Sue.

This endorsement is evidence that we do things such as: monitor and evaluate our programme, collect evidence, listen to feedback, respond to the policy landscape, read the research, evolve the programme in line with changing policy guidelines and follow best practice. There are regular reviews; we were last approved in 2016, and our accreditation is valid until 2018. This keeps us on our toes (or on our pedals)!

For schools, this is peace of mind that Balanceability is of the highest quality. "afPE is delighted to work with such an excellent provider as Balanceability," says Sue Wilkinson.

Worth every penny

Data – there's no escaping it. Evidence, proof, measures, statistics and outcomes... we know this is the reality for schools. And with ever tighter budgets, we understand that you need to justify and account for everything you spend.

Balanceability takes hard evidence and research very seriously. We evaluate the skills of all teachers who undergo Balanceability training for our own purposes. We also teach you how to do your own evaluation. This means that schools can see – and prove – that investing in Balanceability is money extremely well spent.

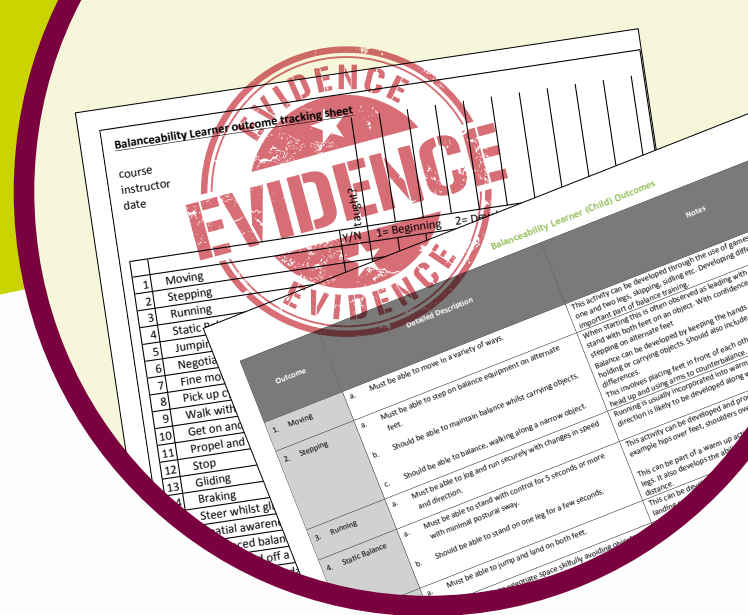
What you do with that evidence is up to you! Some schools present this to their governors. Others share it with colleagues and parents, to encourage wider community support for cycling in general. In East Sussex, Balanceability was rolled out to several Early Years settings, and the council used the data to support its initiative to tackle obesity.



You can check out our certification using the link below:
www.afpe.org.uk/physical-education/professional-development-board/

Evaluation and Research

Balanceability's accredited 'Learn to Cycle' programme is based on evidence about the many benefits children gain from using balance bikes.



There are three aspects to the evaluation and research that we do.

1. First, we evaluate the training that we deliver to staff from schools, leisure centres and other organisations.
2. Second, we teach trainee instructors how to evaluate children's progress, and how to illustrate the results.
3. And finally, we keep an eye on the wider research landscape, so that the Balanceability programme is always relevant, up to date and informed.

This is useful for many reasons:

- We track changes in the skills, knowledge and attitude of the instructors we train – not just with regards to learning to cycle with balance bikes, but also on wider issues around physical literacy and health. This helps funders and Balanceability monitor the impact of our training
- Instructors learn how to monitor the effect of Balanceability on the children they work with. This can help with lesson planning and how the course is progressing.
- Our child tracking system reflects other Early Years goals and can be particularly useful in sharing progress with colleagues and parents.
- It gives schools a set of useful tools for communicating with governors, health authorities and the wider community about a range of issues.
- The data helps funders provide evidence of the impact of their investment.

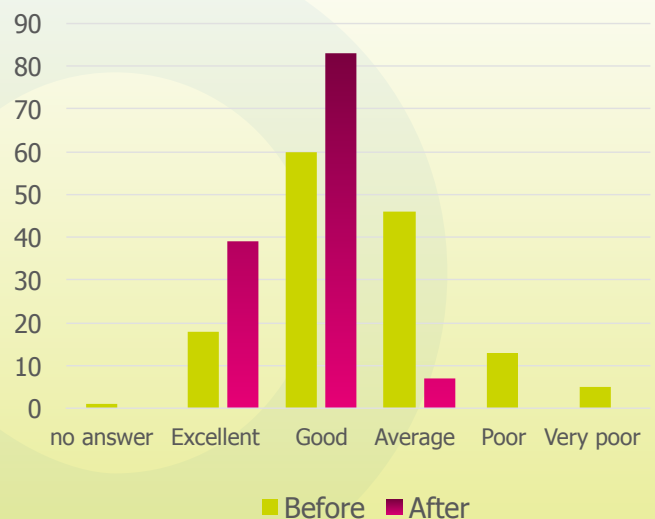
1. Trainee instructors

We evaluate the skills, knowledge and attitudes of members of staff who attend our Balanceability instructor training courses. We look at everything from their ability to fit a helmet and check a bike to whether they are confident in adapting balance and bike activities.

The following chart is a snapshot from all instructors trained in 2016, looking at the change in their ability to talk to parents about issues such as balance, motor skills and coordination.

Far more people felt that their ability to do so was either 'Excellent' or 'Good' after the course (pink bars) than before the course (light green bars).

Ability to engage effectively with parents/carers about physical literacy



Instructors learn how to monitor the effect of Balanceability on the children they work with.

Continued overleaf

Evaluation and Research

2. Children

The Balanceability programme is built around a series of skills that children develop over the course of several sessions. These include outcomes such as static and dynamic balance, knowing how to pick up and manoeuvre a bike, and learning how to glide and stop on a bike. Trainee instructors learn how to identify and record these for each child. A child is either 'beginning', 'developing' or 'secure' in this skill.

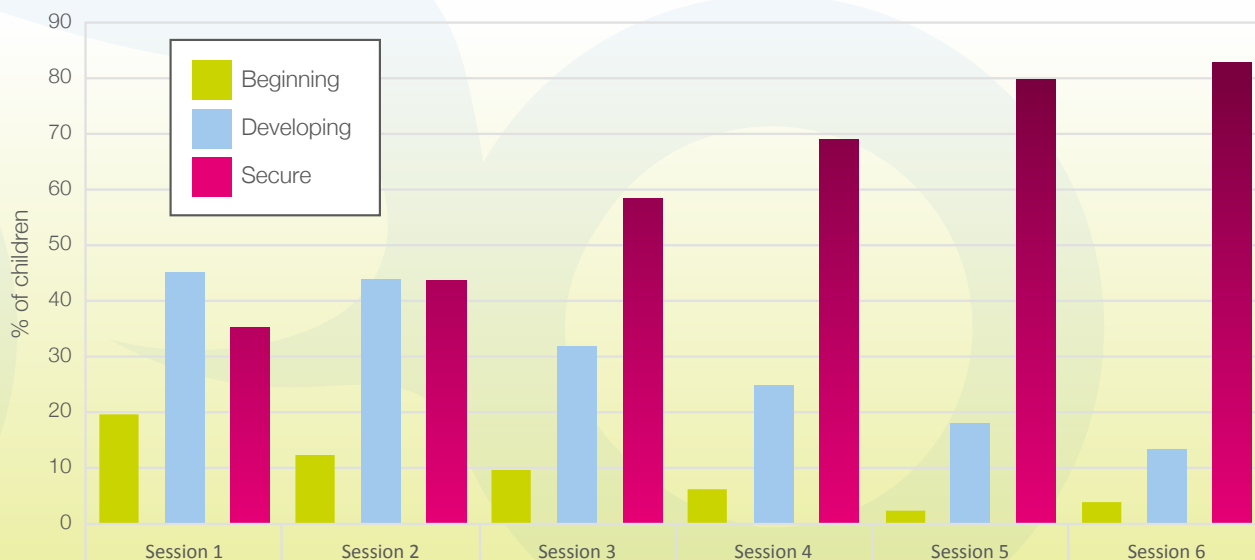
We also show you how to use the raw data to produce useful information. This graph, for example, shows the cumulative change in progress over six sessions over all Balanceability outcomes for a group of pre-school nursery children. It shows that after the first session, children's ability in various skills was quite widely spread out, with quite a few children still mastering the basics. By the sixth session, though, nearly all the children were achieving the session's outcomes!

"By the sixth week, nearly all the children were achieving the session's outcomes!"

3. Evidence base

Balanceability sits at the intersection of cycling, education, health and early childhood development. We keep an eye on the academic literature and policy landscape around all of these. This allows us to adapt and update our training programmes as appropriate, so that our instructor trainers are always up to speed and able to deliver first-class training.

Outcomes: progress over six sessions



Each skill
builds slowly
and steadily
on previous
ones



Daunted by the thought of getting on a bike again?

'Velophobia': The fear of bikes and cycling. It comes from the Latin veloc-, which means 'swift', and which gave rise to the French slang for bicycle: *vélo*.

Actually, there's no such word – we just made that up! Perhaps there should be, though, because many people find the idea of getting on a bike quite daunting. We're very used to working with members of staff who are keen to introduce balance bikes to children in their own schools, but who come to a Balanceability course with considerable trepidation. "To be honest, it was terrifying. I hadn't been near a bike for decades," one teacher told us. "I was quite sure I would make a fool of myself."

If that sounds familiar, rest assured that you're in very safe hands. We've got your back. If you are wary of bikes or feel a bit unsure about your balance, convinced that you won't even be able to pump up a tyre or adjust a saddle, never mind actually teach children how to ride.... fear not!

1. We get it.

2. You are really not alone.

3. We will transform you into a competent, confident and all round brilliant Balanceability instructor.

Here's what you can expect. When you do the training, at some point you'll have a go on an adult-sized balance bike. Your feet will stay firmly on the ground as you experience what it's like to sit on the saddle and move the bike slowly forwards by taking big steps, just like you'll be teaching children how to do later. Not a pedal in sight. You'll soon be confident enough to help children do exactly the same (on much smaller balance bikes of course).

We promise that in no time at all, you'll realise how safe and easy this is. You'll see for yourself how fast children can learn to ride a balance bike (once they've mastered balance bikes, pedalling comes easy). How you feel about cycling now doesn't matter a jot, and you really don't need to be daunted by the thought of getting on a bike again.

"I thought of that while riding my bike"

Albert Einstein (on the Theory of Relativity)



Balanceability Training Day: What to expect



Copperfields Nursery had already received a five-bike Balanceability pack. So deputy manager Alison Coleman had the balance bikes. She had the helmets. She had an information pack, and she had a bag full of colourful equipment. But – having not been on a bike for years – she hadn't got a clue what to do with it all. **It was time to be a Balanceability Instructor.**

Teachers get only six hours of PE training throughout their whole teacher training. In recent research, 40% of primary teachers indicated that this was not enough to prepare them to teach PE.

Feedback – of those who responded to one training day:

- 100% said that the Balanceability instructor was positive and effective (89% said he was excellent).
- 99% rated their satisfaction with the course as good or excellent.
- 83% said that the course had increased their confidence to deliver learn-to-cycle sessions in their setting.
- 89% said that the course had added to their knowledge and understanding of the importance of promoting and enabling physical activity during the Early Years.

In September 2015, Alison Coleman, of Copperfields Nursery in Eastbourne, East Sussex, attended a one-day Balanceability Instructor training day. Alison was one of 77 members of staff from across 50 Early Years settings who have accessed free training, resources and equipment to support them to be able to teach very young children to ride balance bikes (as part of a wider initiative funded by East Sussex County Council – Public Health).

The training (a one-day course) took place at Hailsham Children's Centre. Alison, along with nine other people from various other local Early Years settings, met Balanceability tutor Pete Zanzottera. The first thing she realised was that this was going to be a very hands-on experience. They would, Pete told them, not only be riding a bike themselves, but also working with some nursery-age children from the centre. While Alison was confident about encouraging children to be more active, she wasn't sure about how to introduce them to bikes.

“The best part of the day was the hands-on practical work, role play and having a teaching session with the children.”

Maria Dyas,
Ore Church Mice,
Hastings.



Continued
overleaf

Balanceability Training Day: What to expect

1. Back to basics: balance

Her fears were somewhat allayed when she realised that the focus was not actually about bikes at all – but about balance. “I was struck by how simple the concept is,” she says. “Balance first; bike second.”

The group learned about different kinds of balance and got some insight into why some children find it easier than others. They learned how to use the Balanceability equipment to help children develop static, dynamic and proactive balance, and had a go at balance games themselves, which got everyone warmed up and enjoying themselves.

2. In the saddle: bikes

Only then did they move on to the bikes. “Pete took us through each stage of the learning outcomes, explaining exactly what we should be looking for, from getting children to pick a bike up the correct way through to scooting on a balance bike with confidence,” said Alison.

Balanceability Instructor Training is very practical, and part of the training day involved trying out an adult sized balance bike. “We all had to do what we would be asking the kids to do,” says Alison. “To really understand the importance of, for example, making sure you’ve got your bottom on the seat, we needed to experience it ourselves to see why it was so important.”

It wasn’t just the practical element that was important. Alison also got an insight into what it might be like for a child to do something very new in front of others. “I was so worried I was going to fall off.”

“I now have a good understanding about balance bikes and how they can improve physical development.”

Jasmine Caister,
Ferry Road Nursery, Rye.



3. Practical training: children

At this point, it was time to let the trainees loose on some children for some practice. A small group of children, all around the age of three or four years old, were led into the room. Their eyes widened when they saw the balance bikes lined up against the wall. Alison and her peers then put some of the skills they’d learnt into practice. “We had a go at running part of an actual session, including how to use the evaluation sheet and monitoring the children’s progress,” says Alison. “It was really interesting to do this. When we’d been doing it with Pete, it was obviously all adults, all quite orderly. But when the children came in, it was a bit more chaotic. Some were confident physically, some weren’t. It was very useful to experience that, to see what it might feel like to apply the Balanceability in real life, to teach our own children in the nursery, and to experience the range in physical skills and confidence. One child was very anxious about sitting on a balance bike. Another wanted to know when they’d be jumping off ramps.”

4. Afterthoughts: back in her setting

After the training day, Alison then went back to her nursery and implemented balance bike sessions for the children there, using the Balanceability manual as support.

“The main thing I learned was the importance of going through it one step at a time. Start with balance, build up confidence.” When we caught up with Alison in early 2016, she told us that several children had made the transition to pedal bikes without difficulty. “If you try to just get children straight on to a bike, you’re setting them to fail. But if you do the groundwork properly, they actually find it very easy.”

Cycling as a long-term intervention

Balanceability is the UK’s first and only accredited ‘learn to cycle’ activity programme for children from the age of 2½ years. Alison’s training was part of Healthy Active Little Ones (HALO) – East Sussex programme, an exciting 18-month workforce development programme – funded by East Sussex County Council Public Health – designed to support targeted Early Years settings to build upon their existing good practice and to improve their healthy eating and physical activity approaches and provision.

A child is riding a green balance bike on a polished wooden floor. The child is wearing a white t-shirt, red leggings, and white sneakers. The bike has a green frame, black handlebars, and black tires. A black bell is attached to the handlebars. The child's hands are on the handlebars, and their feet are on the pedals. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Children who
improve their
balance are more
likely to enjoy
other physical
activities

Health and obesity

Given that we're facing an obesity crisis, it's worth pointing out some of the many other far-reaching benefits of cycling.

Learning how to balance and ride a bike helps children improve their overall physical literacy; they are far more likely to enjoy other activities such as jumping, rolling, balancing on logs and using playground or sports equipment. Children who may previously have been reluctant to take part in other activities may develop the confidence to join in. And it's an all-round brilliant workout.

Teachers often notice that children who walk or cycle to school are more alert and ready to learn than those who arrive by car. Some schools lend their balance bikes out to families to use over the holidays, and this can help get entire families cycling. With active lifestyles modelled at home, children stand a much better chance of staying fit and healthy themselves, for the rest of their lives.

The sense of mastery, balance, coordination, agility, sensory processing skills, fine and gross motor skills, judgement, movement, speed, exhilaration... it's all there, on those two nicely pumped up little wheels.

In other words, the benefits of learning how to cycle don't stop at riding a bike!

We see cycling as a kind of Trojan Horse. Like the Greeks sneaking into the City of Troy by hiding inside a gigantic wooden horse, active habits sneak into children's daily lives in the guise of a lightweight balance bike.



Can't manage a 'Daily Mile'?

Five ideas for your school

You've probably heard of the 'daily mile' – the initiative to get pupils to walk or run one mile each day. It's a brilliant for getting kids active, fitter, more confident and ready to concentrate. It's also a great way for schools to respond to the Government's Childhood Obesity Plan, which emphasises how important it is for children to stay active. We know how hard some schools find it to incorporate a 'daily mile' into their day, and so we've come up with our own Daily Mile hacks:

- 1 Make it yours. You could have a daily Yard Yomp, Playground Pound, Green Gallop, Head's Hurtle, Dinner Ladies' Dash... You get the idea.
- 2 Start small. Don't let the idea of trying to run or walk a full mile become a reason to do nothing.
- 3 Focus on time, not distance. An average adult can walk a mile in around 15-20 minutes, but even a 10-minute romp around the school grounds will do all kinds of good. Focusing on time makes it feel more equal, because everyone does the same thing, regardless of fitness or ability.
- 4 Make it fun. Ask the children for ideas. If that means a monthly Zombie Run, a Silly Hat Run, a Glo-Stick Run... so be it!
- 5 Don't just think 'walk/run' – think 'move'. Think WHEELS! Let children take turns using scooters and bikes.

Balance bikes get children cycling at a very young age – much, much younger than if they learn with stabilisers. Once children have learnt to glide, graduating to a pedal-bike is astonishingly easy. Children as young as two can do it!

SEND: Meeting the needs of all children

The Chalet School in Swindon caters for children with complex learning challenges. Two years after investing in Balanceability, it can safely say it has been blown away not just by the number of children who have learned to ride a bike, confounding parents and teachers alike, but also by the progress made in many other skills.

"Lots of children may not be able to access reading and maths, but for those who are physically able, riding a bike is a pretty amazing, tangible and achievable thing," says Liz Lloyd, who delivers the programme at the school.

"Our mission is to have every child leave Year 6 being able to cycle. But we see so many other benefits too."

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, Balanceability trainer Gregory Massey works with older children (aged nine to 16) with autism and Asperger's.

"The ability to ride a bike means that a child can go and play with friends or cycle to school or on holiday, or cycle to the shop to get an ice-cream. It helps bring normal childhood back," he says.

Learning to cycle generates many other outcomes because children master one skill in particular: balance. Patricia Maude MBE, Emeritus Fellow at Cambridge University's Homerton College, who specialises in children's physical literacy, advised Balanceability on the specific elements of the programme. Balance, she explains, underpins just about everything we do. Without balance we can't sit at a table to eat or write, nor can we stand, walk or run or do pretty much anything with our bodies. There are multiple cognitive implications, too.

"Learn-to-cycle programmes that use balance bikes are brilliant because of two key factors: they boost balance, and they build on previous skills," she says.



Boosting balance

All Balanceability's fun games develop balance and stability across the body's midline (standing still, or sitting in a bike saddle, for example). They also promote the development of dynamic balance, enhancing stability on alternate sides of the body (such as walking along a bench).

Progressive skills

Each skill builds slowly and steadily on previous skills. Once a child can balance on one leg, for example, they can try to do so with their eyes shut. As soon as they master walking along a line on the ground, they can have a go at stepping stones. "The progressive activities that form the building blocks of each element of biking provide seamless routes to successful cycling and encourage young children to become independent learners," says Patricia. "Put these two together and you give children access to a world they may never access otherwise – or at least, be unlikely to acquire at the same speed as they can through taking part in a programme like Balanceability."

The beauty of Balanceability is that once teachers are trained up, it's theirs to do what they want with and adapt as they see fit, whatever the individual needs of those in their cohort.

Liz explains how the Chalet School adapted Balanceability for SEND children. "We group children by ability, not age. Children who need to work on their gross motor skills and balance will join the balance games group. Those who need to work on coordination will be introduced to balance bikes. And then we might have a group doing transition to pedal bikes. So I could have a six-year-old and a 10-year-old in the same group."

Another key adaptation is time. Balanceability prides itself on being able to get most children riding a balance bike within 12 sessions. At the Chalet School, time goes out of the window. PE lead Claire Morris says, "We think in years, not weeks. Whatever pace the children want to do and need to work at, that's what we do. The children will get there, and it's amazing how much progress they do make in a short space of time."



Continued
overleaf

Meeting the needs of all children



Materials can also be adapted. Greg, working with older children with autism and Asperger's, enlarges Balanceability's visual resources and sticks them on the wall, so that the children knew exactly what to expect and how long it will take, down to the second. "We adapt everything to their needs, to minimise anxiety," he explains.

The other trick is to break Balanceability's standard milestones into dozens of mini-milestones. "We see each tiny progression as a massive outcome and celebrate every little every achievement.

If a child has improved 0.001%, we know that it's amazing," says Liz. "This is not a quick fix programme, but if you can take the long view, it's phenomenal."

Taking part in a balance-based programme is extraordinarily beneficial for every single child who takes part, whether they learn to cycle or not. Patricia says, "We really need to shout about how important balance and stability are for every aspect of every child's life."

Here is what else Liz, Claire and Greg say about how they use Balanceability with children.

Games: balance

At first, Henry wouldn't even stand on the Balanceability 'stepping stones'. Liz repeatedly used the 'footprint' shapes to get him to concentrate on the left-right stepping motion. It took a whole year, but Henry can now do all the Balanceability balance games independently, and his balance has improved dramatically.

Helmets: sensory issues

Lucas struggles with sensory issues and refused to wear a helmet. His teacher took a helmet into the classroom and let Lucas see it and play with it and watch other children putting it on. Lucas eventually learned to ride. He now has his own pedal bike and goes cycling (wearing a helmet) with his dad, who is thrilled.

Lightweight bikes: confidence

Many children will have had access only to heavy trikes that do little to encourage balance, but the balance bikes are lovely and lightweight, which makes them a pleasure to handle. It is great for confidence and it means that they learn more quickly.

Sitting on the saddle and walking the bike: strength

Sitting on a bike builds up the children's coordination, core stability and muscle strength, but it can take a long time to master the skill of letting the saddle take their weight. Later, children walk with the bike, which develops upper body strength, gross motor skills and coordination.

Propelling: stamina and fitness

Children learn to propel themselves forward, feet on the ground, using the same stability and stepping skills they developed in the balance games. Amelia can do all this, but tires easily. Liz adapted the activities to distract Amelia. "At first, she could only manage 20 seconds before stopping for water. Now she can do 25 minutes."

Spatial awareness and focus

At first, Stanley kept crashing into things. He was in Liz's balance bike group in the hall, following cones and tracks and gradually boosting his spatial awareness. One day, she took him outside, where there is a track round the edge of the playground. "It was brilliant. He was off. We could not believe how focused he was. He stayed on the track, and stopped where I asked him to. His spatial awareness had improved 10-fold."

Outside school: social opportunities

"Cycling opens up so many opportunities for them outside school and for the future. These children may not be able to sit down and tell mum or dad what kind of day they've had, and they may not be able to sit down and play a board game. But they can all go on a bike ride together," says Liz.





Once
children can
glide, using a
pedal-bike is
astonishingly
easy

Further information

Balanceability provides affordable and high quality products and services that combine training with unique product packages.

Bikes and equipment

Schools and Local Authorities typically buy bikes and equipment in pre-arranged 'Packs'. These are a combination of 5-bike or 10-bike 'packs' (prices starting at £495.00) with session plans, course manual, DVD and activity cards.

The pack contains:

- Balance Bikes
- Course Materials
- Session Plans for Level 1 and Level 2
- Laminated activity cards
- Work sheets
- Demonstration DVD

You can also invest in a Balance Bag, which includes all the equipment needed to run the activities outlined in the session plans. We also offer a range of pedal bikes and helmets.

Training

Our aPE one-day training course will enable you to plan, organise, prepare and deliver Balanceability in your own setting as an ongoing programme. Call us or see our website for training venues, dates, current prices and offers.

Free resources

You can download our free Parent Guide, which is full of ideas about balance games, how to support children learning to cycle, technical guidance and tips on safe cycling for children and their families. Further resources can be found on our website.

References

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