Printable worksheet

Bike safety and maintenance check: ABC and helmet fit

A printable pre-ride bike check for children: the ABC Quick Check of air, brakes and chain, helmet fit steps and supervision rules, with a checklist.

Ages	Time needed	Materials
6–14 (always with an adult)	10–15 minutes per bike	Bicycle, Bicycle helmet, Bike pump, ideally with a pressure gauge, Clean rag, Bike chain lubricant (handled by an adult), Pencil and this sheet

Learning goals

By the end of this check you will be able to:

- Carry out an ABC Quick Check on a bike: air, brakes, chain.
- Fit a helmet correctly using simple finger checks.
- Explain why checking a bike before riding helps keep you safe.
- Know when to stop and ask an adult for help.

Step-by-step instructions

Do this check with an adult every time before you ride.

A is for Air

1. Squeeze each tyre hard with your thumb. It should feel firm, not squashy.
2. Look on the side of the tyre for the recommended pressure (a number followed by PSI or bar).
3. With an adult, use a pump with a gauge to check and add air if needed.
4. Look for cuts, bulges or anything stuck in the tyre.

B is for Brakes

1. Squeeze each brake lever. It should feel firm and stop before it touches the handlebar.
2. Push the bike forward and squeeze the front brake. The bike should stop. Repeat with the back brake.
3. Ask an adult to look at the brake pads to check they are not worn down.

C is for Chain (and cranks)

1. Look at the chain. It should look like clean metal, not rusty or clogged with dirt.
2. With an adult holding the bike, turn the pedals backwards. The chain should move smoothly without jumping or squeaking.
3. Hold a pedal crank and try to wiggle it side to side. It should not feel loose.
4. If the chain is dry or dirty, an adult can wipe it with a rag and add a small amount of lubricant.

Quick releases and quick check ride

1. If your bike has quick-release levers on the wheels or seat, ask an adult to check they are fully closed.
2. Ride slowly in a safe, traffic-free place for a short distance to check everything works.

Helmet fit

1. **Eyebrows:** Put the helmet on level. The front edge should be about two finger-widths above your eyebrows.
2. **Ears:** The side straps should make a "V" shape just under and slightly in front of each ear.
3. **Chin:** Buckle the chin strap. You should fit only one or two fingers between the strap and your chin.
4. **Yawn test:** Open your mouth wide. The helmet should pull down on your head. If not, tighten the chin strap.
5. Check the helmet for cracks or damage. A helmet that has been in a crash should be replaced.

Checklist

Date: _____ Bike owner: _____ Adult helper: _____

Check	What I looked for	OK? (yes/no)	Problem found	Fixed by adult?
A: front tyre	Firm, correct pressure, no damage			
A: back tyre	Firm, correct pressure, no damage			
B: front brake	Lever firm, bike stops			
B: back brake	Lever firm, bike stops			
C: chain	Clean, runs smoothly			
C: cranks	Not loose			
Quick releases	Closed tightly			
Helmet: eyebrows	Two fingers above			
Helmet: ears	Straps form a V			
Helmet: chin	One or two fingers			
Helmet: condition	No cracks or damage			
Test ride	Everything works			

Reflection questions

1. Which check did you find easiest? Which was hardest?

2. Why is it important for brakes to work before you ride?
3. What could happen if a tyre was too soft?
4. Why does a helmet need to fit snugly rather than loosely?
5. What would you do if you found a problem you could not fix?

Safety notes

- Always do this check with an adult. Adults should handle tools, lubricant and quick-release levers.
- Keep fingers away from the chain, spokes and brakes while wheels or pedals are moving.
- If anything is broken or you are not sure, do not ride. Ask an adult or a bike mechanic to look at it.
- Ride only where an adult says it is safe, and follow your local road rules.
- Younger children should ride in parks, playgrounds or traffic-free paths with an adult close by.
- Wear a correctly fitted helmet and bright or reflective clothing. Use lights in low light.

Background for adults

The ABC Quick Check is promoted by the League of American Bicyclists as a quick pre-ride inspection: air, brakes, chain and cranks, quick releases, then a short, slow check ride (League of American Bicyclists). The helmet steps follow guidance from UC Davis Children's Hospital, including the two-finger eyebrow rule, the V-shaped side straps and the mouth-open check.

Helmets are worth fitting properly. A Cochrane systematic review of case-control studies found that bicycle helmets reduced the risk of head, brain and severe brain injury by 63 to 88 per cent for cyclists of all ages (Thompson, Rivara and Thompson, 1999).

This sheet is a basic pre-ride routine, not a substitute for professional servicing or road-skills training. Supervision should match each child's age, skills and the riding environment. For more on safe family travel, see the related article on sustainable transportation for families.