

to hold tight around the rider's waist, not only as a way to hold on, but also to alert the rider that their passenger is possibly drifting into dreamland. If it is apparent that the kid is nodding off, they either nudge the little tike or pull over to awaken them with a stretch break and a quick walk. But this technique requires the parent to pay attention to the kid, which is an unsafe distraction. And it still doesn't address the issue of a kid's inability to hold on in some situations.

An alternative to simply holding onto the rider's waist or a grab rail is the Buddy Belt, which is a wide belt that secures around the rider's waist and provides straps for the passenger to hold onto. This provides a more secure and convenient hold, but it is only effective if the child can actually hold on. Another alternative is a device called the Child's Riding Belt, that straps the child to the adult. This harness has a wide strap that goes around the rider's waist and is connected to another strap that goes around the child's waist, between the legs and over the shoulder. There is a thick foam block between the rider and passenger with handle grips for the kid to hang onto. This seems to be a well thought-out product. However, the concept of strapping a child to a large adult is problematic in the event of a fall, particularly if the pair were to tumble.

Yet another alternative is a backrest with arms such as the type found on large touring machines. These backrests can assist in holding the child onto the motorcycle while allowing them to clear the bike in the event of a fall. Our daughter has been securely nestled in a homemade device bolted to a retrofitted luggage rack. Arm extensions allow her to fall asleep without fear of falling off, yet do not fasten her to the motorcycle. Under no circumstances would we recommend attaching your child to the motorcycle.

THE RIDE

Obviously, there are some environments where risks are greater—environments best avoided when riding with kids. Congested, rush hour traffic tops the list of situations to avoid, followed by nighttime rides. Staying on roads with little traffic and a lot of visibility can minimize encounters with errant drivers and unexpected hazards. Some might suggest staying near home, riding in the neighborhood and vicinity. But be aware that it is easy to be complacent about riding gear and attentiveness when "we're just going around the block."

Beginner passengers need a bit of training before they are allowed to mount a motorcycle. It's smart to warn them about hot parts and to coach the child about when and how to mount, where to hold on, and how to communicate with the rider. The first ride should be short, with a visit to an empty parking lot to familiarize the child with the new sensations and to give the rider some practice carrying such precious cargo. After the child is comfortable, it would be a good idea to practice some evasive maneuvers and quick stops. Take it easy at first. Eventually the duo can graduate to longer rides and even some short day trips. Longer trips can follow if all goes well.

To ensure a good experience for all, it's important for a rider to consider the needs of their young passenger. Many adults are happy to ride for an hour or so without the need for a stop. But children quickly get bored. Plan on more stops and be sure to include fun destinations that the kid will enjoy, such as ice cream stands or petting zoos. Rider-to-passenger intercoms can keep the child awake and offer a more interesting ride if there is the possibility of dialog. Another way to keep kids involved is to give them jobs, such as simple navigation or backseat photography.

MCN's safety guru, David L. Hough, who is a father, grandfather and great-grandfather, suggests that the only reasonably safe way to carry a child under age 11 on a motorcycle is in a sidecar. A sidecar can also allow a child to nap, read, or play computer games without concern that the child will fall off or become easily bored. A hack is also a good option if you have more than one child to take on the ride. Even if a sidecar isn't your thing, the security a hack provides may be worth the tradeoff. You might decide to be a sidecarist during those important years when your children are small, and get back on two wheels after they become teenagers.

Riding with kids can be tremendously rewarding for both parent and child. And with a serious attitude toward the risks and forethought toward preventing injury, motorcycling can be a reasonably safe family activity. But only the most conscientious parents should consider including their children on the ride. 🍀

RESOURCES:

Children's jackets and pants:
<http://www.vixens.co.uk>

Child's Riding Belt Company
(780)973-3253
www.childridingbelt.com

Buddy Belt Enterprises, Inc.
(908) 850-0612
www.buddybelt.com



In some cases, a backrest can help keep the child on the motorcycle.



A sidecar provides a reasonably safe way to carry a child.