

Risk Management

Here are some recurring situations common to cycling coaching and ride leadership.

How would you handle these cases? Do you have specific legal duties? Would your actions be different if you were a participant on the ride rather than a coach or ride leader?



CYCLE HANDOUT

Questions

1. Your group is leaving the parking lot. You are in the lead. A rider, whose bike had been hidden, steps out of the restroom, climbs onto his bike, and rolls out at the tail end of your group. You notice after a couple of miles that this rider is not wearing a helmet.
2. You are practicing paceline skills, and a rider unknown to you, joins the group.
3. Your group is at a convenience store getting something to drink after a long climb. Before descending, you notice that one of the rider's tires has a sidewall cut.
4. Your group of 15 is approaching an intersection. The yellow light turns red as the two lead riders go through. The rest of the group stops, except one rider from the back of the group who sprints through to join the two leaders.
5. You are practicing riding in a group, and one of the older women in the group seems a bit wobbly. You notice a couple of times that riders riding near her are startled by her actions.
6. Your group is 15 miles from the start point. As you are climbing the local 6% grade, a 55-year old member of your group says he's feeling okay, but a little tired, a little short of breath, and that his chest is tight. Would your action change if the rider were 30 years old?
7. Away from the city, one of your riders is in a crash and bleeding profusely from a gaping hole in her elbow.
8. You are riding paceline in a group, getting a good workout. You notice that the quick-release skewer of one of the riders is not fully closed. You don't know whether the skewer is loose, or whether it has been tightened in a way that doesn't allow it to be in its normal, closed position.
9. You are moving fast in a pack on a route relatively free of intersections and traffic. A truck comes along traveling a few miles an hour faster than the group. Two riders jump into the slipstream of the truck.
10. You have organized a group of 15 riders. At a traffic light, another group of 15 riders catches up and the groups merge.
11. You are riding along in a mixed group of 15 riders, and overhear one rider tell another a racist or sexist joke.
12. You are descending the local mountain, and notice that one rider is cutting corners, going over the center line, and seems to be traveling faster than his skills allow.
13. You notice a rider who appears to think that the ride is a good time to conduct business and personal telephone calls. He rides along engrossed in mobile-phone conversations.

Discussion & Answers

1. Helmets are required on all rides. Although everyone has access to roadways, those within our programs must occasionally agree to abide by standards greater than those mandated by local, state, or federal laws.

Wearing a helmet is one such requirement for participation in almost every organized cycling program in this county.

Naturally, if you can accommodate such a rider, you may. For example, if the rider has merely left his or her helmet in their car, they might be able to return and meet up with the group again at some other point. Or someone

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in the group may have a loaner. Or the rider may train on their own.

To reiterate: risk management policy dictates that riders not participate without a helmet.

2. You don't know the skills of this new rider. More importantly, the beginner riders in your group don't know either.

Of course, you don't want to be rude, and you may be meeting a potential participant.

I usually roll them off the back of the group and explain who we are and why we are training. I explain it's our inexperience and problem, rather than their lack of expertise, and ask for their help in staying out of the group.

3. If you notice a problem, you must determine whether it is safe or not to proceed.

The sidewall cut may be inconsequential. You may be able to boot the problem. A cautious descent may be an acceptable risk.

But if you are not sure about the safety of the situation, help your rider arrange for an alternative method of transportation.

4. It is your job as a coach to notice dangerous behavior, and help your group participate safely in the future.

A new safety lesson or message may be best given privately to an individual or as a lesson to the group, depending upon the circumstances.

Such behavior must not be overlooked.

5. You have several responsibilities. Your immediate concern is to protect the safety of the wobbly cyclist and the safety of other cyclists. Is this wobbly rider a danger to herself or to others? If she is a danger to others you must remove her from their paceline or vicinity.

If she is a danger to herself and doesn't have the skills to balance well on a bicycle, she doesn't meet the criteria for entry into most programs.

If you are comfortable and have the time, resources, and energy to teach these ground-zero skills, you may be willing to do this, perhaps at another time.

At a minimum it sounds as though this wobbly rider needs to be aware of her actions and be given instruction on straight-line riding.

How to give such feedback and teach skills are elsewhere.

6. We are all occasionally breathless with exertion.

The point of the question is, regardless of age, are you thinking "possible heart attack?"

If so, don't just think about that, act on it.

Not everyone in such a situation has anything seriously wrong. But some do. Unless you are sure of the correctness of a less extreme response, call 911.

7. One of the responsibilities of a coach is to know first aid. Either you or the rider should apply pressure and stop the bleeding.

8. Stop. Check.

9. Again, it is your job as a coach to notice dangerous behavior, and help your group participate safely in the future.

A new safety lesson or message may be best given privately to an individual or as a lesson to the group, depending upon the circumstances.

Such behavior must not be overlooked.

10. Until experienced, large groups of cyclists are inherently more dangerous than small groups. Hold the slow group back, send the faster group ahead.

11. One of your responsibilities as a coach is to help protect the civil rights of your athletes.

Making a sad face, looking away, or ignoring such remarks is not a sufficient protection. You must counsel the rider about the unacceptability of such remarks. Again, depending upon the situation, this may be best done individually or as a group.

12. If you can shout and safely have the rider slow down, fine. Don't put yourself at risk trying to chase this rider down.

When you meet up again, counsel the rider.

13. Although hands-free mobile phone use with an earpiece affords better control of the bicycle than cradling the phone in one ear, riders depend upon their hearing to notice vehicles coming up from behind.

Bicycle riding can be dangerous and it generally requires the operator's full attention. The best risk management policy is prohibit mobile-phone use while riding in groups. Pull over to receive or make urgent or emergency calls.

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