

Advice sheet

Standing and Walking

This guide has been developed to offer advice and suggestions that will promote development of the necessary skills (balance and standing) which help a baby begin to progress to independent walking.

When and how do babies start to learn how to walk?

Walking typically develops between the ages of 12-18 months however, some babies learn earlier or later than this. Development of walking usually begins when a child learns to stand pulling up and holding onto the furniture e.g. the sofa. Please note that Baby walkers do not promote independent walking and should be avoided. When babies have achieved moving into this standing position reaching for toys placed either side of your child encourages them to weight shift and move their weight onto either foot. They will often practise this when they want to come for a cuddle or moving away when it's time for a nap! These small attempts of shifting their body weight are crucial to how they learning to step. Placing toys further away from your child's reach will result in them beginning to cruise (stepping to the side) and also importantly learning to take their hands off any support. Learning to fall and recover is also an important early skill that will prepare them for the challenge of independent walking.



How can I help?



Still have lots of tummy time (lying on their front) with your baby as this will help them to strengthen their back and trunk muscles which will help them gain postural stability. Place toys on the sofa or other surface as well as the floor so your child will begin to think about reaching and then standing up.

These simple activities have been provided below to help you assist your child to develop independent mobility. They just require an adult with an assortment of motivational toys! If however, you continue to be concerned about your child's

gross motor development or your child is over two and not walking please contact your health visitor or general practitioner.

What should be avoided?

Baby walkers and door bouncers do not promote independent walking and should be avoided. Practice makes perfect and it is crucial that your child is not rushed into stepping before they are developmentally ready to do so.

Early development of standing: Playing on the back of the sofa

The back of the sofa is a good place to encourage standing as your child can lean on the cushions for support and also have a new place to play.

Place a couple of your child's favourite toys on the back of the sofa, this will encourage them to stay upright to play and promote enjoyment. To help your child sit next to them on the sofa and stand them up so they are leaning on the back cushions.

Make sure they have their hands on top of the sofa so they can play with the toys you have placed there. Support them by putting your hands on their bottom helping their hip straight (extended).



Standing and side stepping: Cruising along the sofa, feet on the floor

Find your child's favourite toys and place these on one end of the sofa, (this could be noisy toys like bells or keys.) These toys should help to motivate your child to move sideways towards these items.



Stand your child in front of the sofa with hands on the seat cushions or kneel in front of the sofa with your child sitting on your knee, feet flat, facing the sofa.

Place their hands on the cushions of the sofa, and with your hands on your child's hips guide them forwards and up into a standing position. Make sure they are prepared to stand by telling them they are going to play standing up!

Encourage your child to reach sideways for the toys. Make sure you let your child sit down if they tire. Move the toys to the other end of the sofa so they practise stepping both way i.e. to the left and right.

When they are confident standing at the sofa, encourage your child to take one hand off at a time by offering a toy for them to take.

Once your child has mastered this you may like to vary this game. Place toys on the floor for your child to retrieve so they have to bend down to get the toy. Lift this if it's too difficult; hold the toys towards the floor so they do not have a far to bend down. This will aid development of standing balance and help them practise letting go of the furniture and remaining upright.

How to develop your child's ability to independently step: moving between the gaps of furniture

Set up a play environment for your child using a low table (coffee table), stool or chair placed near to the sofa making sure there is a gap (half a metre or less) between these. Place your child's favourite toys on the table/stool/chair. With your child standing facing the sofa, entice them to move towards the table to play with their toys. You can then move the toys onto the sofa and encourage your child to step in the other direction. As your child become more confident and proficient at this make the gap wider so they have to do more stepping before they reach their toy.

