

the early years toolkit

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Helping a baby develop standing and stepping

How can I help my child to stand?

Your child can be held supported in a standing position from an early age.

This allows the child to experience the feeling of their body weight through their feet.

They may bounce up and down. They do this to develop the strength in their leg muscles.

You can stand your child in many different ways, for example on your lap when you are sitting in a chair, in front of a coffee table or sofa or on the sofa cushion next to you with their back against the back cushions.

As they get stronger, they will need less support from you and they will use their hands on the furniture to support themselves more.

When they can stand briefly without holding on, they are ready to learn to step along the furniture or 'cruise'.

How can I help my child to learn to pull to stand?

- You should kneel-sit on the floor in front of a sturdy coffee table or low sofa. Place toys on the furniture.
- Sit your child on your knee with their feet on the floor.
- Encourage your child to reach forward and hold onto the furniture.
- Put your hands around their hips and assist them into standing by moving their hips forwards as they straighten their legs.
- Alternatively you can place your child in kneeling position

What can delay my child learning to pull to stand?

It is important for your child to spend lots of time every day on the floor playing in different positions. Baby bouncers and baby walkers can actually delay a child's ability to learn to pull to stand and to stand independently.

This is because they support the child in a position that they are not developmentally ready for. They don't allow the child the opportunity to develop strength in the right muscles. As you have to lift a child in and out of the equipment they cannot learn how to move in and out of standing for themselves. Avoid using equipment and support your child in a standing position at your household furniture.

The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists does not recommend the use of baby walkers and door bouncers.

Pulling to stand?

Babies pull themselves to standing at furniture in preparation for standing without holding on and eventually walking.

A child may start to pull to stand as early as nine months of age or as late as 18 months. Children who bottom shuffle rather than crawl are often later in pulling to stand.

Initially they will be unable to get back down to sitting in a controlled way and will 'plop' back onto their bottom.

How can I help my child to start stepping?

Once your child is confident in standing, they will be keen to explore by taking steps. They will usually side step along furniture first.

As they stand at a coffee table or sofa, place a toy just out of their reach. This will encourage them to try and step sideways along the furniture towards it.

Walking along furniture helps develop strength and balance. As their confidence increases, they will hold on with one hand only and eventually let go.

You can walk along with your child holding their hands until they are ready to let go.

Push-along toys can be fun as a child moves from cruising to walking independently. Heavier wooden trolley style toys give more stability to the child than lighter plastic ones.