

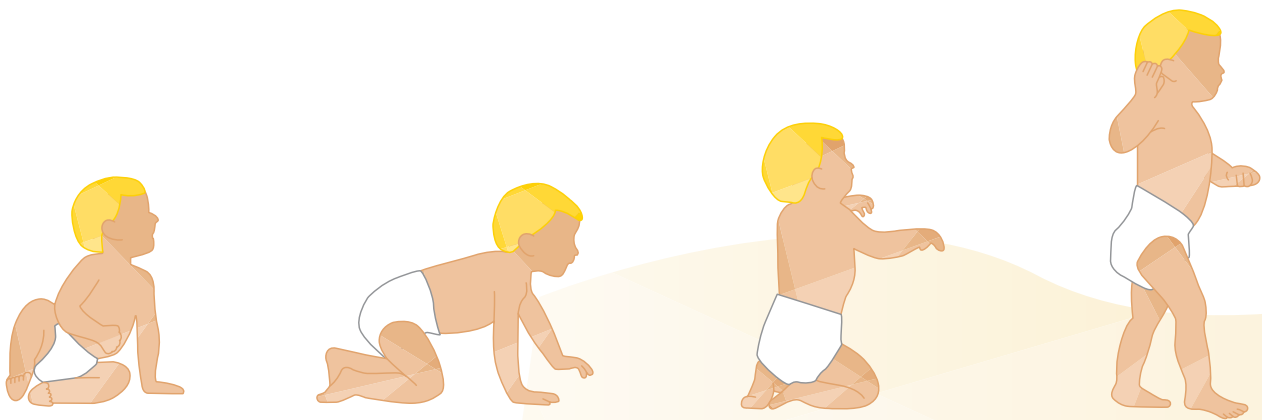
GROSS MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

FOR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY

STANDING AND WALKING

General information:

- Children with developmental delay can sometimes take a long time to learn to walk independently, even after they have learned to walk with support.
- It is harder for your child to balance and co-ordinate their body as they do not get the same sensory information, particularly if they have a lower muscle tone and are a little bit floppy.
- Every child is different and develops at their own pace - let your child guide you to which stage they are at. If your child dislikes a particular activity initially, persevere with this and keep introducing it for short periods of time.
- Motivation is vital when learning any new skill, so ensure you use their favourite toy, game or treat to help to encourage them to do it.
- Physiotherapists **do not** recommend sit in baby walkers or bouncers for any children, particularly those with developmental delay or altered muscle tone. Baby walkers can actually impair development rather than enhance it.



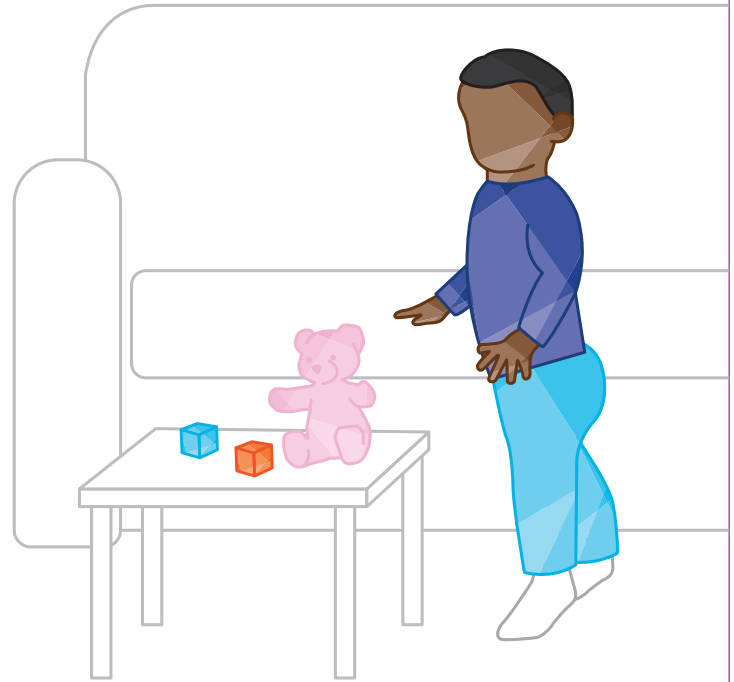
Just to note

- Some children may stay at one stage for a long time, or they may even miss out a stage altogether.
- Your child needs lots of opportunities to practise activities in standing to help develop and improve their skills.
- It is also useful to work on a couple of activities at the same time to help build skills, for example walking between two supports or surfaces and practising walking with a push along walker.

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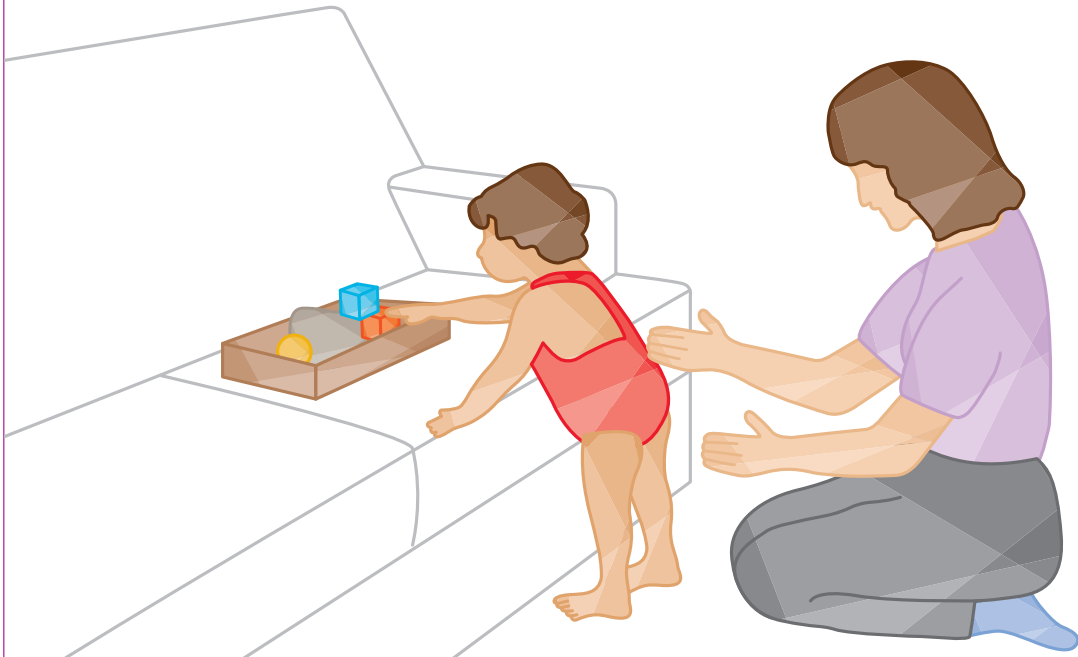
Standing and turning

- Now that your child can stand at the sofa to play, encourage them to turn to reach for a toy behind them.
- Place a table or another piece of furniture behind them and encourage them to reach for toys from this surface, eg shape sorters or inset puzzles.
- Gradually increase the distance between the pieces of furniture. Initially, your child will need to reach and balance more to get the toys and then will start to step between the furniture.



Squatting

- Encourage your child to squat down to reach for toys - initially they may fall down if the toy or snack is too low for them.
- Your child may hold on and reach down while standing.
- As muscle control improves, your child will start to bend their knees to reach down further and then stand up again.
- Squatting is an important part of development - this helps when potty training as your child will need to be able to squat and stand when getting on or off the potty.



Cruising

This is when your child starts to move along sideways, using the furniture for support. They may lean with their trunk and tummy at first and then just hold on with their hands.

Starting position:

- 🚩 Standing with the support (normally the sofa) at chest height.
- 🚩 Your child should be standing up tall and facing forwards.
- 🚩 Support your child around their hips and gently guide their weight onto one leg, freeing up the other leg to step.
- 🚩 Help your child position their leading leg out to the side (about a hip's width no more). Guide their weight over this leg and allow them to step their other leg to meet it in the middle. In the early stages you may have to help your child to move their legs, while they are learning what they need to do.
- 🚩 Practise in both directions using toys or objects of interest to help encourage them.

Climbing on and off furniture and up the stairs

Children will start to want to climb on and off furniture, normally starting with the sofa or bed. To help your child develop these skills, and progress to climbing the stairs, you can support them with the following:

Starting position:

- Help your child lift one leg up on to the sofa and hold it there while they try to work out how to pull themselves up (you may need to help them with this at first).
- To climb down, encourage your child to turn onto their tummy, and slide down until their feet reach the floor.
- As they become more confident, they will require less support from you and may even slide straight down into a sitting position.
- When climbing the stairs, help them in the same way by supporting one leg and let them lift the other onto the step.
- Remember to repeat these activities with both legs leading so they can practise these skills both sides.



Walking with a push along walker

- Use a solid, stable push along walker or toy.
- It should be roughly chest height, or slightly lower, and wide enough for your child to step between its wheels.
- Encourage your child to pull up to standing at the walker.
- Support the walker so it does not “run away” with your child.
- Clear some space in a straight line for your child to practise. Practising on carpet to start with will make it easier for your child to control the walker.



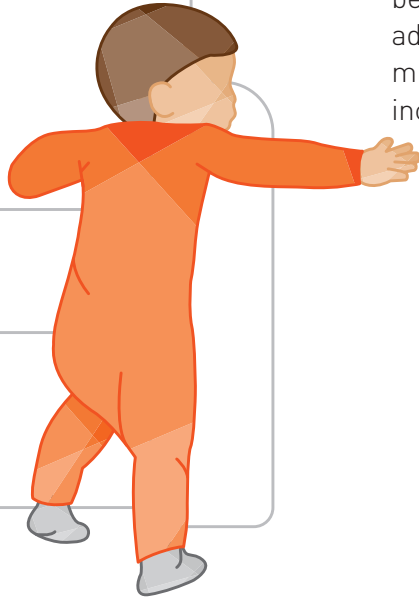
Walking with two hand support

- Hold your child's hands at **their** shoulder height or below.
- Stand in front, (or you and another person could stand either side of your child each holding one of your child's hands), and encourage them to take steps.
- You can use items such as hula hoops, or a rolled-up towel for your child to hold on to as their confidence increases.



Walking between two supports or furniture

You can encourage your child to step between two pieces of furniture, such as the sofa and a table (as mentioned at the start of this information sheet), or between an adult and the sofa or even between two adults standing close together. As their balance, muscle control and confidence improves, you can increase the distance between the supports.

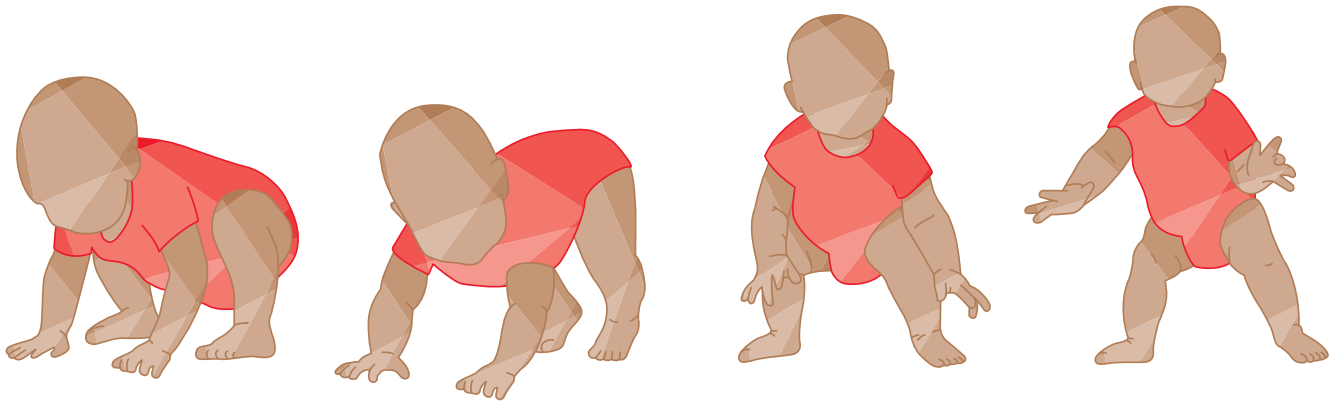


Walking independently

- 🚩 Gradually encourage your child to let go of your hands, when walking, or of the surface or support at which they are standing.
- 🚩 Start by holding your hands out just in front of your child, so they can step only one or two steps towards you.
- 🚩 Increase the distance as your child's balance improves - expect your child to be unsteady at first and they may even fall into your arms after only a few steps.
- 🚩 Your child may initially have their arms held up high to help with their balance (known as high guard) but, as they get better at walking, their arms will lower and become closer to their sides.
- 🚩 Your child may "waddle" or have their feet pointing outwards in the early stages of walking independently; this is all typical and will change over time as strength, control and confidence increase.

Standing from the floor independently

Your child will usually start to try and stand from the floor independently without support once they have developed their balance, co-ordination and strength. Your child will start in a squatting position and then push up through their legs so that they are straight, while keeping their hands on the floor. Once they have their balance in this position, they push through their hands from the floor and lift up into standing. Your child should not need to use their hands on their legs to help them to do this.



Footwear

Once your child is a fully independent walker, it is important that they wear supportive shoes to help support their feet as they grow and to develop their foot posture. Physiotherapists do not recommend footwear before this stage. Lightweight ankle boots or trainer style shoes tend to provide the best support. Ensure the shoe can be fastened with laces, Velcro or buckles to keep the foot secure inside the shoe. Try to avoid shoes with flexible soles or heels or that feel “squashy” when pressed or twisted. Remember to get your child’s feet measured regularly.

