

My child is so close
but seems too
nervous

Pre-walker

Can shoes
make a
difference?

They have been
stuck standing at
a surface for a
while now

They won't even
try without
holding my hands

**Guide to starting or improving your
child's ability to stand and take steps**

Does your child's hands seem glued to support? Do they demand you holding their hand(s) or seem interested in standing/walking but too afraid to try? Or perhaps you think they will get there but want to know how to help! We have found the following activities helpful for kids to build the strength, balance, and confidence to progress in standing and walking. We hope they can also help your little one on the cusp of standing and walking on their own!



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Week 1 – Stand With Back Against Wall

Let's start with encouraging your child to practice standing on their own! Standing with their back against the wall is a great way to begin teaching your pre-walker how to stand without relying on arm/hand support. Kids often start standing by pulling themselves up and holding onto the support surface in front of them. They become accustomed to having support in front of them and may even be getting help from leaning into it. Introducing a support on the other side of the body challenges this and gives your child a different experience.

Place your child against the wall and make sure their feet are positioned under them. If you have to move their feet back, go ahead. You want to see them take weight through their feet and turn the leg muscles on to maintain it. Since this is potentially different than anything they have experienced before, it may take a few tricks/tips to get that response.

Standing with their back against a wall will automatically increase the amount of hip muscle activation needed to stand, therefore working on strengthening needed to progress towards walking.

Tips/tricks:

- Stay close, your body being right in front of them can be reassuring
- Add distraction right away, engage their hands in play with an item at face/shoulder height
- Keep your hands on them as they adjust and once they seem more comfortable/confident, very gradually decrease your contact
- Use your body as the "wall" – go onto your knees and straighten your hips so your body is relatively straight up from knees on ground to head

To increase the challenge:

- Try having your child reach towards the side to get a toy of interest - starting with small reaches and working up to bigger reaches to make them work harder and weight shift more.
- After sideways reaching, present items in front for your child to reach forward towards perhaps coming off the wall for a moment.



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Week 2 – Transitions Between Parallel Supports



Here is another **activity** to help your child to help build their comfort not having both hands on a surface a time and progress to standing on their own.

Set up two supports parallel to one another about 1-2 feet apart. You you're your child to be able to touch both surfaces if positioned in-between them so adjust accordingly. A sofa and coffee table are often two perfect surfaces to start working on this; however, any two surfaces that your child can comfortably stand at will work.

The key to this task is to **start very small**, setting up the situation so that your child can touch both surfaces at the same time as mentioned above. Have your child position with both hands on one of the surfaces. Use a toy to gain their attention/interest and place it on the other surface to elicit them working their way from one support to the other.



Once your child seems comfortable, gradually **increase** the distance between the surfaces. Some kids do best with an inch at a time while others may be comfortable with a larger change. See how your child responses and know that if they seem to hesitate because of the change you can go back and decrease the amount. It's incredible the subtleties that kids may notice and if that is the case, there may be a degree of trickery needed!

As the surfaces get spaced further apart, you will notice a greater degree of reaching in order to complete the transitions. You may even notice a moment when both hands are off support!

Tips to keep in mind:

- Allow your child to be successful 2-3 consecutive times at any one distance before increasing the distance
- Make sure to alternate directions your child is turning towards!



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Week 3 – Transition Back At Support To Surface

The basics of this next **activity** goes back to week 1 of standing against a wall. Now we will progress beyond those forward reaches you were working on!

Place your child with back against the wall starting with their feet out from the wall ~3-4 inches. Unlike week 1 now the feet are a little more forward so when they shift forward to put body over feet they will have to come off the wall. Place a

surface or yourself in front of them and lure them into leaning further forward to reach it/you. As your child transitions forward they are challenging their hip and



core muscles to create stability following a weight shift which is a key component for walking.

What about holding their hands during walking practice?

Yes, this can be another great activity!

Here is the progression of difficulty from easiest to hardest:

- Two hands held overhead
- Two hands held shoulder to tummy height (lower provides less support/control)
- One hand held overhead
- One hand held shoulder to tummy height
- Forearm support (hold/contact your child at their forearm rather than hand)
- T-shirt hold (pinch their t-shirt giving them just a little help for balance)

This is great when you don't have as much time or equipment to set up other scenarios already discussed, or to add variety to practice along the way!

Push toys are another great option!

Consider adding weight to it or stabilizing it yourself when your child starts. Reduce weight/stability over time as they improve!

Just like week 2, **start small** and think gradual increases! You may need to start at a distance that just a lean of the trunk forward is enough to allow them to reach and that is totally okay, you can work up from there. Progressively increase the distance you or the surface is from your child.

You will likely notice your child will then lean forward to place their hands on the surface then take a step or 2 to reach the surface - this is good!

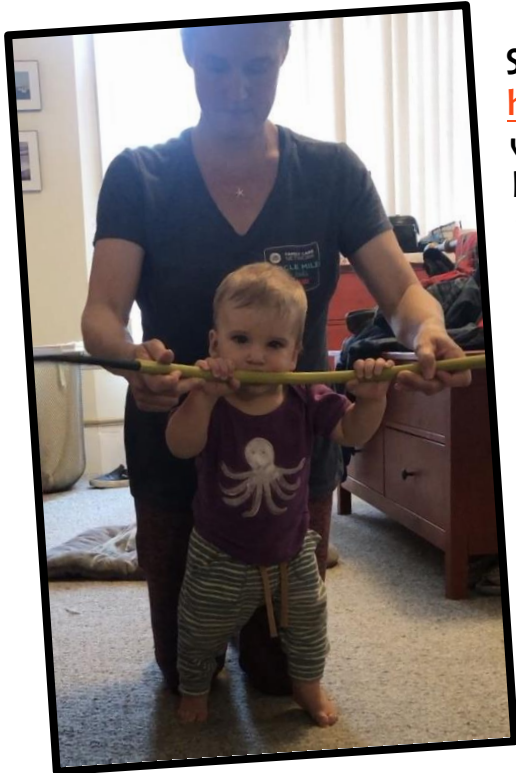
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Week 4 – Walking With Shared Toy

Your child is now taking a couple steps towards a support and likely taking steps holding your hand. The one challenge that can present after practicing walking with hand hold assistance is reliance on it! The comfort of gripping an adults hand can be hard to ween off of. One approach that can help is adding a shared item to put some separation between you and your child. You hold one end and your child holds one end. They still get help from you but not quite as much. You can also control how much support goes through the item. Holding tightly would provide more support while holding loosely or adding a little movement to the item would provide less support.



intentionally move the item/toy around, making it more dynamic and unstable.

Some of our favorite toys to use include hula hoops and diving rings, but you can also use books, water bottles, brooms, sand buckets, favorite blankets, etc. - any toy where you are able to hold a portion of it and your child is able to hold another portion of it will work.

As mentioned above, begin with providing a lot of support by holding rigid, not letting the item wiggle around too much. Then gradually reduce the support you give. See how playing around with the amount of effort you put into holding the item

makes your child work differently? To really up the challenge, you can

I can't get them to grip the item! Or this is still too hard!

Start hand over hand as seen in the picture. This can help your child understand the item is for support. Once they pick up that concept and start to feel more comfortable, gradually move your hands further away on the item.

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Week 5 – Sit To Stand At Support

This next activity helps to work on hip muscle strengthening, which is an important component of standing and walking. Start with your child sitting on a step where their feet can touch the ground. A step stool is often great for this age/size. Position the step in front of an elevated surface like a sofa or coffee table. Place a toy or object in interest on the surface to have your child transition into standing at the surface to receive it. Once they transition and have a little time for play, you can help them back down to repeat. Your child is doing early squats!



Once they seem to have the transition from sitting to standing down, you can gradually progress the step back so the surface is farther away. This can first result in them coming to stand without using hands on the support and can progress to them coming to stand and taking a couple steps to get there!

Tip/trick that may help!

If you don't have a step stool, you can use your lap as see in the picture above!

Sometimes kids have trouble because they aren't shifting their trunk forward but rather pushing back in an effort to come up. If this is the case, place your hands on the sides of their trunk and help bring it forward before they put in effort upward. They will likely improve with repetition and need less from you.

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Week 6 – Independent Walk Short Distance

Now your child is taking a couple of steps forward towards a support and it is time to work on distance. The key here is starting short! Position your child 1-2 feet from support and allow them to be successful stepping towards the target. Once they seem to have that distance down, position them a little further away gradually increasing the distance over time.

Don't forget to allow them to practice a few times at each distance before moving on. This can be really exciting so it is easy to want to progress quickly. Support them building confidence this way and it might just click!



T-shirt pinch/hold

As your child works on independent steps, there is a trick that may help them be successful call t-shirt hold or pinch. Often when we are working with kids in this phase, we pinch their shirt around the area of the shoulders to give them a tiny bit of input to stay standing/walking. It's more an illusion than actual help but sometimes it really works!

The gradual release

Check out this video that shows a good example of a gradual release. It might just take you gradually wiggling your fingers free to get them to be on their own.

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Congratulations to your emerging walker and for your patience helping them get there!



Now allow your child lots of practice to refine this new movement. If after a little time it seems you need more on how to help progress them further, check out our new walker program!

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