

My child is walking now, is there anything I can do to help them progress?

# New Walker

My child still seems off balance, is that normal?

Why does my child go back to crawling when they meet a challenge?

It's best to stop them from falling, right?

## Guide to helping your child improve their walking skills

Now your child is walking on their own and you may be wondering now what? We put together this 6 week program to help your new walker become a proficient walker. The activities each week will help them build strength, endurance, and balance allowing them to walk independently in a variety of contexts. We hope you have your running shoes ready so you can keep up!

[Amazon Toy List](#)



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# Week 1 – Distance & Uneven Surfaces

## Distance:

An important concept when working with a new walker is helping them build confidence! Experiment to find what distance your child is currently comfortable with. You can do this by seeing how they respond to various placements away from a support surface or person they want to walk to. Notice at what point they drop down or lose their balance and then position them that distance from their destination. Do repetition from there until it starts to seem easy. Then place them a few inches further back and repeat the process. Over time you will notice they can walk longer distances and are choosing to walk over crawl!

## Uneven surfaces:

Next is adding some new challenges! One of the first challenges we like to introduce to kids is walking across uneven surfaces. Start with a surface that has just a little variability like mostly flat grass or packed dirt. Over time you can gradually increase the challenge to more patchy grass, uneven dirt, tree bark, and sand. You can also work on uneven surfaces in your home by using a yoga mat and relatively flat objects like small books, magazines, or newspapers. Place the items under the yoga mat to create a bumpy surface for them to walk across.



## Small surface changes:

Another great activity when your child is at this stage is working on small surface changes such as carpet to yoga or exercise mat and vice versa. A new walker may be more hesitant at those transition points and may lower to the floor to crawl across instead of walk. If this occurs, provide them some encouragement to stay on their feet by giving them a light hold at one of their forearms or pinch the sleeve of their shirt to give them just a little help or to create the illusion you are helping. Hopefully one of these approaches will give them just a little confidence to stay on their feet. Over time as you see their confidence build, you can gradually take your help away!



It is important to keep in mind that falls are normal and common during this stage. Falling and getting back up is an essential part of building up the balance reactions that are necessary to progress with walking skills. Keep them safe from serious injury but also allow them the learning process!

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# Week 2 – Walking While Holding Objects

This week we are going to focus on walking with the added challenge of [holding objects](#). [Walking while holding](#) something changes your child's center of mass and therefore makes them work differently to maintain their balance. Start with an object that is light and easy to grip like a favorite toy, cup, bottle, snack container, bowl etc. Then over time introduce bigger items or ones that require two hands to hold. Mix up size, shape, and weight to introduce variable experiences! Once your child does well with a object on flat, easy ground, consider incorporating our week 1 activities by varying the surface they are walking on to further challenge their balance. This may go without saying but use items that are okay to fall to the floor as a loss of balance could occur and we expect your child's hands to go out to help protect themselves rather than protecting the items!



## Getting Into Standing

Your child may have already figured out a way to get into standing from being on the floor, but we wanted to take a little time to explain how to help if needed.

There are a few variations your child may use, but often the [key steps](#) are getting into a hands and knees position, bringing knees up off the ground while the feet plant down, getting into a squat position or keeping knees relatively straight while working hands back towards feet until weight is mostly in feet. Last is straightening knees if in a [squat](#) or lifting upper body if performing the latter. You can help by placing your hands at the side of the hips to provide some stability while they arrange their feet and/or help them shift their weight back over their feet. Check out this [blog/video](#) to see it in action!

Another challenge to try!

[Walking in a busy environment](#) is another great challenge to incorporate into this week. Having to work around toys, people, and even pets results in some stop/go, direction changing, and problem solving!



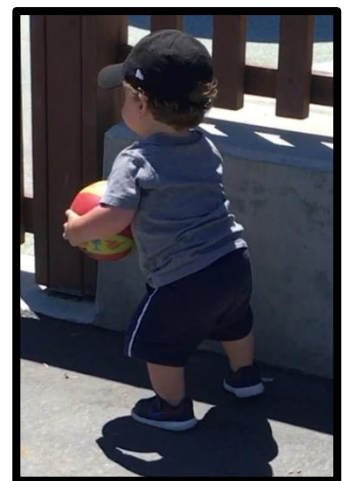
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# Week 3 – Walk, Squat, Continue Walking

This week we are going to focus on [picking up items](#)! First let's talk about your child ability to squat down and return to stand with some support. Allowing one hand on a [support surface](#) or one [hand held](#) by you is often a good place to start. Alternate which hand is supported so they experience variety. As you notice them getting more confident with it, move away from the support surface and/or adjust the help you give them. There are a couple ways you can adjust your help. One option is to adjust the height of your support. Holding their hand such that their arm is overhead when they are down in the squat allows them to pull to assist coming back up. If you instead hold their hand lower such as shoulder or belly height, a pull will provide less assist and their legs will have to do more. Another way to adjust your help is by changing the location of your contact. Allowing your child to grip is often the easiest for them. You can make it more challenging by



Another approach to support: Having a variety of options is best when working with kids! If other techniques discussed here don't do the trick, try providing some [input at their hips](#). Place a couple fingers of each hand on the sides of their hips. Follow them down as they squat providing just a little inward input for stability. Feel for their effort and if necessary supplement it but without taking over!

holding their forearm/elbow instead. Once they get the hang of that, you may be able to give very light support by pinching their t-shirt, which gives more the allusion that you are helping.

As you start to wean off support, you may notice your child place [one or both hands down](#) on the

ground in the process. This is expected as they work to build the strength in legs and core and overall balance so they do not need that extra point of contact for stability. If your child tends to drop all the way down to the ground rather than staying on their feet, it can be helpful to start reaching for an item about hip height as that reduces the range of the squat needed. Once that height seems easy, you can progress it closer to the floor by doing some repetition at mid-thigh, then knee, mid-shin, and 1-2 inches off the ground. Lastly return to an item on the ground and hopefully by this point they have developed all they need to retrieve it. Keep in mind, it may take time and [several small falls](#) to get there!

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# Week 4 – Inclines & Declines

Next we are going to work on small changes in elevation! Areas at/near your home that may work for this include the driveway, sidewalk cut out, slanted but smooth area in the yard, a bike ramp, a wedge, or firm pillows/blankets formed into a wedge. Other areas in the community that may work include wheelchair accessible ramps, small hills at the park, or a pitcher's mound.



Walking up an incline requires your child adjust by shifting their weight forward to prevent from falling back. The situation changes the demand on their body as it requires more from the leg muscles on the back side of the body and the front tummy muscles to keep the trunk forward.



Walking down is also a great way to build balance and strength. This direction requires keeping weight shifted back. The muscles in the front of the upper legs and the back muscles must work together to prevent falling forward. Sometimes going down is more challenging than going up because your child has to fight against letting momentum fully taking over.

For both, it is best to start with low grades and over time progress the difficulty by working on steeper or higher grades. It will likely become easier to find areas in the community to work on this once your child gets more comfortable with the activity. Keep in mind the general principal that it gets more difficult as the grade gets steeper!

## Uphill or Downhill Standing

Another balance challenge that may be great to introduce this week is static standing uphill and downhill. Sometimes achieving stability in these situations is trickier than handling them with movement. It is okay to give your child a hand at first and gradually reduce your support by progressing to contact at their forearm, light touch at shoulder, t-shirt pinch, and then hands hovering when ready!

Check out these blogs for more details on [why static balance can be hard](#) and why [core stability is so important](#) for new walkers!



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# Week 5 – Stepping Over Objects

This week we are going to work on [stepping over objects](#). This is an important part of walking progression given we meet obstacles in our path every day and at times the only thing we can do is step over them. This task is often one of the first situations that requires your child maintain a moment of standing on only one foot. This is sometimes unnerving for our little ones as full weight shift to one side takes a lot of strength and balance and in response they may seek out extra help or try to avoid stepping over by choosing to walk around instead.

Let's start with something low/narrow such as a broom stick, garden hose, or [sticks](#). Similar to last week, go ahead and give them a hand at first to help them build confidence. Over time as you notice their comfort with the motion increase, gradually reduce how much you help.

Once that seems easy on their own, advance the activity by increasing the height or width of the object. Examples of objects that may work include your leg (closer to ankle is easier, closer to thigh is harder), rolled up yoga mat or towel, a lineup of stuffed animals, whiffle ball bat, and pool noodles. If you don't have a variety of objects, you can also increase the challenge using the first item by placing the two ends on a low surface to bring it slightly up off the ground adding height and time your child must balance on one leg as they go over it. Keep in mind the importance of allowing [trial and error](#) because that greatly supports learning!



Keep an eye on which leg likes to lead!  
Ideally your child will switch it up so that  
each foot gets a chance to build  
strength/balance to hold up the body!

Another way to add challenge!

Set up a series of items with various heights. Your child will have to  
assess the situation each time and adjust the amount of weight  
shifting and foot lift to meet each individual challenge!

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# Week 6 – Step Up & Down

Next we are going to work on stepping up and down small heights! When going up, the challenges are to balance on one foot to get the other up onto a step and then use the strength in the leading leg to be able to push up onto the higher surface. There are likely several options that you come across each day that are suitable for working on this. Examples include stepping up to get out of a play structure area, to cross a door threshold, and to get onto a thick carpet or rug. You can also create opportunities by using textbooks, phone books, small sturdy boxes, firm folded blankets, pillows/cushions if not too soft, or even a step stool. As your child starts with this activity, you may notice them [putting their hands down](#) to assist. That's okay! If you see that try giving them a hand so they practice staying upright and over time gradually decrease how much you help as described in previous weeks.



Once it is time to step down, your child has to do things a little differently. They have to balance on one foot and also control that knee bending to allow the other to reach the lower surface. This is often more challenging than going up because it demands more from one leg. You will likely be able to use all of the situations and materials described above, but will proceed in the reverse. It may be helpful to give your child a hand at first to take away some of the balance demand and allow them to focus on the bending of the knee. Over time as each leg gets stronger, it will be able to control both the balance and the strength components. Start with small changes in height and [build over time!](#)

## Play with speed!

As your child gains experience walking, we expect them to start picking up their speed in an effort towards running. This often comes naturally when your child is trying to chase after you, a friend/sibling, or the family pet! If needed, show them so they can try to mimic!

## Put it all together!

Try combining all the skills we have worked through over the past weeks to create a home obstacle course. Grab items need to a series of challenges including: uneven surface, step over, holding objects, and up/down hill. We love using a puzzle or other toys with multiple pieces. Put the pieces on one end of the course and what they go in on the other end!

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**Congratulations to your independent  
walker and all your work helping them  
get there!**



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