

My Child Isn't Walking...Should I Be Concerned?

Walking is a major milestone that is often on parents' minds. While it is frequently stated that a child walks by one year of age, the ability to walk can happen at any time. Some children walk before they are a one year old while others are still working towards it at two or even older. Learning to walk is not an easy feat as it requires strength, endurance, balance, and coordination along with a great deal of confidence to try, fail, and try again. Therefore, it is not surprising there is so much variability in achievement. In order to determine if concern is warranted, you can look at what the child is currently able to do. By looking at their ability to perform the precursors to walking you can gauge how close or far they are from achieving this milestone.

Is your child able to stand?

Before being able to walk, a child needs to be able to stand. So look to see if your child is pulling to stand at furniture or if they are standing holding onto your hands or support.

- Tips to encourage standing:
 - Place toys your child likes or is motivated by on a bench or chair in front of him or her while sitting on the ground. This will hopefully encourage them to pull on the support to come to standing in order to retrieve the items.
 - Place your child in standing at a surface and get him or her engage in an activity.

Is your child cruising?

If your child is standing but not yet taking steps then the next thing to consider is whether or not your child is cruising. Cruising is when a child moves sideways along support surfaces while holding on. It helps a child practice and learn to shift their weight to one leg to allow for the other to be lifted off of the floor and progressed forward.

- Tips to encourage cruising:
 - When your child is standing at a support, place toys at the end of support out of reach to encourage them to attempt to side step towards it.

Is your child transitioning between support surfaces?

If your child is cruising but not walking, next consider if they are attempting to move between pieces of furniture. At first your child will likely keep one hand on support at all times, but as they build strength, balance, and confidence he or she may depart from support for a moment in order to move to the next surface.

- Tips to encourage moving between supports
 - Space out your couch, coffee table, and chairs close enough that your child can move from one place to another while keeping a hand on support at all times. He or she may take 1-2 steps between supports or keep feet planted while reaching as far as possible to get hands on the next support surface before they move their feet.
 - Gradually increase the space between the supports to progress the activity and encourage moments of independence.

If they are doing all of the above (standing, cruising, moving between supports) then they are almost there. If they are not doing these precursors consider speaking to your pediatrician or a pediatric physical therapist to get specific advice on ways to promote progress.