

## Therapeutic Approaches to Encourage Walking in Toddlers

- Fill up an empty diaper box or laundry basket with books and have child push along the floor to encourage walking in a supported manner.
- If available, have your child walk using a push toy, assisting them as needed with steering and slowing down.
- When child is pulling to stand at the couch or other surfaces, encourage sidestepping by placing some of their favorite toys to either side of them. This will encourage cruising, which is a precursor to walking, as it requires the child to shift their weight and maintain balance throughout.
- Have child sit on your lap/knee in front of a couch or chair with their feet touching the floor. Place their favorite toy on the couch and encourage child to stand up from your lap and reach for the toy. You can then scoot back a bit to encourage the child to take a few steps towards the couch in order to get to the toy.
- Take off their socks and shoes to encourage exploration of different surfaces with bare feet. This recruits the smaller muscles in the child's feet, which helps with supporting the structure of the foot as they begin walking. It also will help improve their balance and ability to weight shift.
- When they are taking early steps, consider having child in just their diaper, as some clothing can be too bulky and it's important that their lower body can move freely as they learn.
- Spread their toys into different areas in the play space. Place some on higher surfaces, especially their favorite toys, as it will encourage them to stand, reach and even take steps at times.
- Reduce the amount of upper body support they need while standing by holding toys up above them or out to the side. This will distract them and force them to maintain balance through their own base of support. You can do this by holding a book or puzzle up in front of them and have them try to take a step and maintain their balance as they turn a page or remove a puzzle piece.
- Increase their strength and ability to walk independently by helping them climb up stairs or slides.
- Provide support while walking by allowing your child to hold onto your hands or fingers and guide them forward. You can progress by moving from whole hand to finger support, and then to only supporting one side.
- Sit across from another person and have child attempt to walk from one person to the other. Encourage steps with their favorite toys on the other side and provide assistance as needed.
- When providing assistance, start with your hands higher up on their trunk, at their rib cage. As they become more stable, you can provide your assistance at their hips, which will require them to use their core and trunk more actively.

