

Walk & Talk

MINI KIT PLAY GUIDE

12M+

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Hi, You

Hi, you!

You never forget those first steps.

My son Leland was 14 months old. My husband and I had been walking him with his hands way above his head for months (I wish I'd known then what I know now about holding their hands lower). We were in the basement at our old house, and Leland walked all the way across the wood floor to me—it must have been 10 steps in a row. He was holding a small, light ball in each of his hands, and I don't think he realized he was walking on his own.

As your child turns 1, so many firsts seem to be happening at the same time. Learning to walk and learning to talk are two big ones, and they're more connected than you might think. Both rely on similar brain systems for planning, timing, and coordination. When your child practices balancing or adjusting their body to take their first steps, they strengthen the neural pathways that support language at the same time.

You might notice a pause in new words as your toddler focuses on walking, then a burst of language once their balance feels steady. The brain tends to focus its energy on one big new skill at a time, so while walking is “under construction,” language learning can temporarily slow down. It’s not that your child has stopped learning words—their brain is simply prioritizing motor planning and body control. Once walking becomes more automatic, the brain has extra capacity to shift attention back to language. That’s often when you’ll hear a lot of babbling and new words.

It’s natural to focus on the whens and hows of your child’s development—we’re here with you for that. But as a mother who is a little further down the path, I want to remind you to enjoy all the “under construction” moments, too.

XO,



Jessica Rolph
Cofounder and CEO

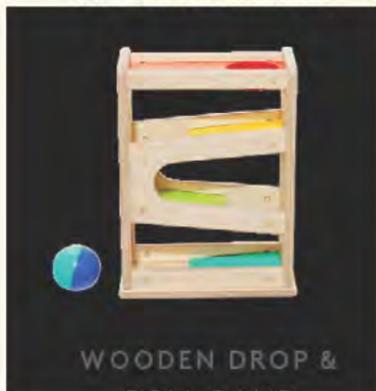
Included with the Walk & Talk Mini Kit



MY FIRST WALLET



'MY FIRST WORDS'
BOARD BOOK



WOODEN DROP &
ROLL RAMP



BIG KID BALL

Important safety note: Always supervise your child as they're learning to walk.

Soft, carpeted areas can help cushion falls. Cover sharp corners or hard edges to add extra protection as needed.

Walking & Talking

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Tip

Try to avoid “walking” your child by holding their hands high over their head. Instead, hold their hands at their shoulder height or below.

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Learning to Walk

Most toddlers take their first steps between 10 and 15 months. Independent walking comes a bit later, with practice. By 18 months, most children can walk without help. You'll know your child is getting ready to walk when you see them testing out pre-walking skills like pulling up to stand, cruising, squatting with support, and standing unassisted.

The best thing you can do to help your child learn to walk is to give them playful incentives to practice their pre-walking skills. Once they're walking confidently, they'll be ready to tackle new challenges, like carrying a soft plaything across the room or pushing their favorite pal in The Buddy Stroller. The activities in this guide were developed by physical and occupational therapists to encourage movement and get your child confident on two feet.



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The stages of learning to walk

Cruise along furniture

Holding on for balance, your child begins to take side steps along the couch and other low surfaces. Cruising helps your child learn how to shift their weight from one leg to the other—an important skill for independent walking.

Squat with support

Your toddler lowers their body down to pick up a toy and pushes back up to standing, sometimes holding on to someone or something for support. This strengthens your child's legs and develops balance and control.

Stand without support

Standing independently—even for a few seconds—shows growing stability and confidence. Your child may let go of furniture on purpose to practice balancing on their own.

The first independent steps

Your child may start with one or two hesitant steps before plopping back down, then quickly progress to walking short distances. Frequent practice—and your encouragement—help your child build the strength and coordination to walk more consistently.

Carry an object while walking

As your child grows steadier on their feet, they may begin walking while holding a favorite toy or soft ball. With their arms busy, they have to use their core and legs to stay balanced. This new ability shows growing strength, control, and independence.

As they're learning to walk, give your child:

- Plenty of barefoot time so their toes can grip, balance, and experience different textures. Try a wood floor, carpet, sand, grass, or a nubby bath mat.
- Sturdy furniture and low surfaces to cruise along—with a safe fall zone.
- Space to explore. A clear, open floor between pieces of sturdy furniture gives your child freedom to move and practice their new skills.
- Your close supervision to protect them from sharp edges and hard falls.
- Motivation to move. For example, you can squat a few feet away with your arms outstretched or display toys and books on low, open shelves for your toddler to investigate.

Fact

Children need to hear a word up to 20 times before they learn its meaning or try to say it themselves.

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Learning to Talk

From 12 to 18 months, your child’s receptive language grows faster than their expressive language. That means they can understand far more words than they can say. Most toddlers say their first words—or word approximations—around 12 to 15 months. For example, they may say “ba” for *ball* or “uh” for *up*. By 2 years old, most children are using simple two-word phrases and can be understood by close family members most of the time. You’ll know your child is getting ready to talk when they point to things they want and you hear lots of babbling and “jargon”—nonsensical syllables or babbles with adult-like intonation patterns.

The best thing you can do to help your child learn to talk is to engage them in lots of meaningful, back-and-forth interactions. This guide was created along with pediatric speech and language experts Brooke Dwyer and Bridget Hillsberg of The Speech Sisters. The activities are designed to help you tune in to your child’s communication cues and provide playful incentives to talk.



The stages of learning to talk

Babbling with purpose (8 to 12 months)

Your child experiments with sound patterns—*mamama, dadada, or babababa*. This rhythmic play strengthens the muscles used for speech and lays the groundwork for word-like sounds.

Using gestures and sounds to communicate (9 to 15 months)

Pointing, waving, and lifting their arms to be picked up are all early forms of communication. When you respond to these gestures with words—“You want up”—you help your child connect actions to language.

First words (12 to 15 months)

Words may start out as partial sounds or invented versions. Your child uses them to name familiar people, objects, or needs—*mama, ball, more*. Responding and repeating the word back shows your child that what they say has meaning.

Word explosion (18 to 24 months)

Vocabulary can grow quickly during this stage, with new language appearing daily. Your toddler begins combining words—*more milk, go car*—and experimenting with tone and rhythm. These short phrases show that your child’s understanding of language is expanding rapidly.

Early conversation

(around 24 months and beyond)

Your child starts to use language to share ideas and feelings. They might answer simple questions or tell you about something that happened. These first conversations strengthen your child’s confidence and connection with you.

As they're learning to talk, give your child:

- Imitation—if they babble, babble back. If they point, tune in to what they're interested in and point to it, too. Your child loves back-and-forth exchanges with you, so respond if they make a gesture, sound, or attempt at a word. For example, if they say “ba,” say the word *ball* back to them.
- Five to ten seconds to make an attempt at communication. This works best when you've given your child a reason to communicate, like a question to answer or a problem to solve.
- Plenty of eye contact. Facing your child as you talk or read to them allows them to see your expressions, gestures, and mouth movements. Being face-to-face also helps you tune in to what your child is interested in.
- Opportunities to see and hear the same words over and over again throughout daily routines. Try to repeat a new word at least five times during a back-and-forth exchange.

The Playthings

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Cruise along the couch

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Cruise along the couch

My First Wallet

Why do this

Cruising—taking side steps while holding onto furniture—is one of the most important pre-walking skills. It helps your child practice shifting their weight from one leg to the other and strengthens the muscles they'll soon use for independent walking. Adding a playful goal, like an interesting object to reach for, keeps your child motivated along the way.

How to do it

- Offer your child a sturdy surface like a couch or low table that they can hold onto for support.
- If your couch cushions are removable, you may want to try setting them aside to see if it's easier for your child to pull up and cruise without them.
- Place the wallet and its various parts along the surface so your toddler has fresh motivation every few steps.
- Once your toddler has had some practice, challenge them to navigate around a soft ottoman or upholstered chair.



Balance with a book

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Balance with a book

'My First Words' Board Book

Why do this

Cruising along the furniture allows your child to stay steady by holding on to whatever's in front of them. You can give them a new challenge by turning them around so their base of support is behind their body. Without anything in front to lean on, your child has to figure out how to balance more independently. This stage builds the confidence and strength they'll use to take a few steps on their own.

How to do it

- Once your child can stand at the couch, turn them around so their back is to it.
- Read to your child in this position, holding the book within their reach so they have an intriguing reason to practice balancing as they stand.
- Encourage them to turn the pages. Each time they reach, they'll get more confident about standing unassisted by moving their body away from the support surface at their back.



Moving from one surface to another

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Moving from one surface to another

My First Wallet

Why do this

A brief moment of moving without support challenges your child's balance and confidence. Create a small gap between two stable surfaces to help your child shift their weight, plan their next move, and adjust their body to stay steady.

How to do it

- Set up two pieces of furniture—like a couch and a low table—parallel to each other. Leave enough space in between for your child to hold onto both pieces of furniture as they cruise. For safety, stay close and be ready to help your child if they lose their balance.
- Place the wallet on one surface and its contents on the other. Encourage your child by showing them the wallet, then picking up one of the cards and putting it inside. See if your toddler does the same with another card.
- Slowly increase the distance between the two pieces of furniture, so your child needs to let go of one support surface to reach the other.
- For a new challenge, encourage your child to take some forward steps. Sit or kneel at one end of the aisle you've created, with your child standing at the other. Hold out the wallet and invite them to come and get it.



Squat to stand

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Squat to stand

Wooden Drop & Roll Ramp

Why do this

As your child becomes a more confident cruiser, you may see them begin to hold onto the furniture as they squat down to reach something on the floor. Repeated squatting practice will strengthen your child's core and leg muscles to prepare them for walking. It's important to keep encouraging this even once your toddler has begun to walk. The ball ramp gives them a fun reason to squat down and stand back up again ... and again.

How to do it

- Set The Wooden Drop & Roll Ramp near either you or a piece of sturdy furniture your child can pull up on for support.
- Once they're standing, hold the ball at their knee height so they have to slightly bend their legs to pick it up.
- Encourage your child to try and put the ball into the ball ramp. You might say, "Can you put it at the top? Ready, set, go!"
- You can make this activity even more challenging by holding the ball lower, or even setting it on the floor for a deeper squat.



Carry it to me

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Carry it to me

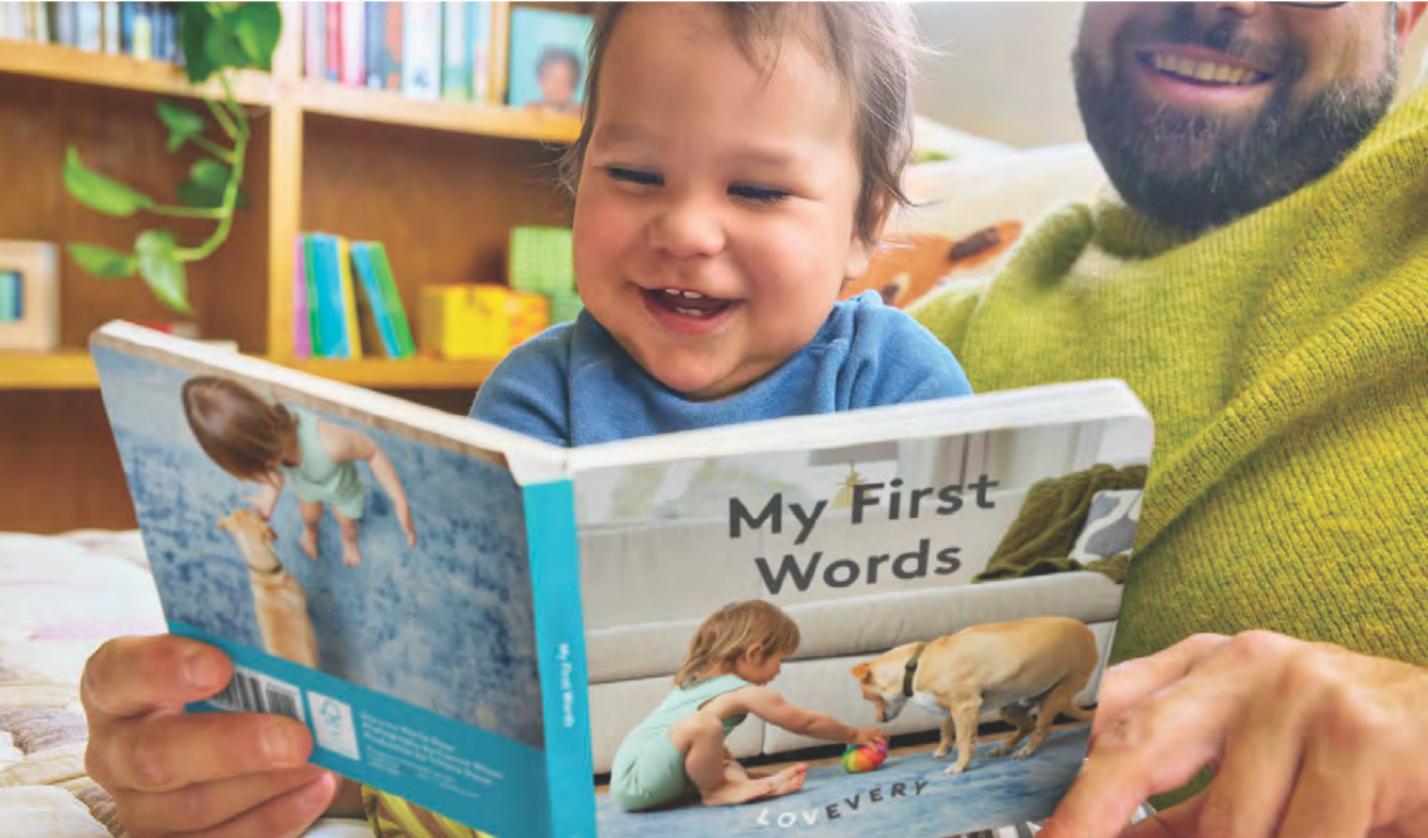
Big Kid Ball

Why do this

When your child began to walk, they likely held their arms up and out for balance. As they got steadier, they were able to bring their hands lower and closer together. Now, as a confident walker, they can hold something with both hands as they move. A soft, lightweight ball is best because it will challenge your child's balance without shifting their center of gravity too much. It will also give them a soft place to land if they fall.

How to do it

- Do something silly—like bouncing the ball off your forehead—to encourage your child to go get the ball and carry it back to you.
- You might say, “Can you bring the ball to me?” Children typically begin to understand and follow simple, one-step directions around 12 to 15 months.
- You can also have your child watch you “hide” the ball. Then, ask them to find it and bring it back to you: “Where did the ball go? Is it behind the chair? Please bring it to me.”



The first words

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The first words

'My First Words' Board Book

Why do this

Toddlers tend to say the same first words—those for *Mama*, *Dada*, *ball*, *hi*, and *no*—no matter what language they're learning. Researchers have found a couple reasons for this. First, many of those words use sounds that are easiest for your child to make, especially *p*, *b*, and *m*. Second, your child's earliest words come from what they see, touch, hold, or point to—like your face, the family dog, or a ball.

How to do it

- After your child starts saying words with *p*, *b*, and *m*, they will start to say sounds with *d* and *t*.
- As you read *My First Words* together, emphasize and repeat the words in bold print. Once your child is familiar with the book, encourage them to chime in by giving them a phonemic cue—say the first sound of a word and see if they can finish it.
- Read the book again ... and again. Repetition helps your child learn new words, remember the story, and eventually predict what comes next.



Fill in the blank

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Fill in the blank

Big Kid Ball

Why do this

Speech and language experts often use a fill-in-the-blank strategy to spark early words. Try pausing before the last word of a familiar phrase, like “Pass me the ...” This gives your child processing time and a clear cue that it’s their turn to say something.

How to do it

- Sit on the floor and roll the ball back and forth with your child.
- Repeat the word *ball* several times as you play. You can say, “I roll the ball, then you roll the ball. I roll the ball, then you roll the ball.”
- When your child rolls the ball to you, wait for them to ask you to roll it back. Give them “waiting body language.” Stay down on their level, put your hands out to the sides with your palms up, and open your mouth or eyes wide for five to ten seconds.
- A longer pause can feel unnatural, but it gives your child an opportunity to try and communicate. Respond right away to any vocalization, whether they say “ball” or a word approximation like “ba” or “bababa.”
- If they don’t say anything, then give them the words. Say, “You want the ball! Here’s the ball.”



Ready, set, go!

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Ready, set, go!

Wooden Drop & Roll Ramp

Why do this

Parents often focus on naming objects—*ball, cup, dog*. But action words like *go, roll, and drop* are just as important for your child's early language development. Verbs help your child describe what they can do and what's happening around them. Speech and language experts know that learning verbs is a key step toward building longer phrases and sentences later on—verbs give structure to language. As your child begins to understand and use action words, they lay the groundwork for combining words into short phrases like *ball go* or *push it*. This is an exciting milestone in expressive communication.

How to do it

- Hold a ball as you make eye contact with your child.
- Smile and say, “Ready ... set ...” Pause to build anticipation and then hand the ball to your child.
- As they push it into the top of the ramp, say “Go!” with enthusiasm. Cheer or clap as you and your child watch the ball roll down the ramp.
- After several repetitions, pause before the word *go* and see if your child tries to say it or makes a sound.
- Try narrating other parts of the play: “You pushed it!” “The ball rolled!” “Let’s do it again!”



Open, close, repeat

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Open, close, repeat

My First Wallet

Why do this

Research shows that toddlers learn new language best when they hear the words in the same context again and again. This is called semantic mapping, and it's how your child begins to understand that certain sounds always pair with certain actions.

Open and *close* are functional words your child will often use in their everyday life: Open the wallet, close the wallet. Open the door, close the door.

How to do it

- Using My First Wallet, play a game of open, close, uh-oh with your child.
- Animate your voice as you open and close the wallet. Say, “Open, close!” Then, dump the pieces out and say, “Uh-oh!”
- Repeat the game a couple of times. Then, pause and hand the wallet to your child. If they open it, say “Open!” If they close it, say “Close.” If they spill the contents, say “Uh-oh!”
- Use these words whenever they naturally come up during the day, like as you open and close a book, a snack container, or a door. The more your child hears “open, close” as something opens or closes, the more those words connect to their meaning—and the more likely your child is to try and say them, too.

Everyday action words to try

Go: "Let's go outside."

Come: "Come to me."

Push/pull:

"Push the ball."

"Pull the string."

Roll: "Roll it to me."

Drop: "Drop the block."

Open/close:

"Open the door."

"Close the lid."

Stop: "Stop the car."

Wash: "Wash hands."

Turn: "Turn the page."

Sleep: "Time to sleep."

Up/down:

"Lift up!"

"Sit down."

Eat / drink:

"Drink your water."

"Eat your banana."

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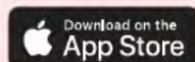
The Time to Talk Toddler Course
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