
Friends and Family

Squeaky Shoes - motivating young children to move

Summary: Extract from Insight Magazine article where two parents try out "Squeaky Shoes" with their children as an aid to learning to walk.

- Isabella's first steps
- Motivating Eve

Could a shoe with a squeak motivate a young child with a sight problem to take those first independent steps? In an issue of Insight magazine two mums try out "Squeaky Shoes" with their daughters. We include extracts from their stories here...

Isabella's first steps



Our three year old daughter Isabella is a playful, adventurous little girl, full of mischief and life. She has Retinopathy of Prematurity (she was born almost four months early) which affects her in different ways, but mainly her blindness meant she needed a lot more entertainment than a sighted baby and in the early months she was carried around everywhere in a papoose and we always explained all her surroundings to her and what she was hearing. Over time she compensated for her sight loss by finely tuning her hearing and memory, developing very good speech for her age along with what seemed like built-in sat-nav for her to scoot around our home very quickly and efficiently!

Isabella developed into a very competent crawler, but she had no desire to walk unaided. She had all the mechanics for walking but just wouldn't let go of furniture, walls or hands. We tried to

encourage her by walking with both her hands in ours over her head, but she just wouldn't go it alone without holding on to something.

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She was nearly there, but clearly needed some new motivation. The offer of trying out a pair of squeaky shoes captured my imagination straightaway. This might be the answer for us. We decided to give them a go.

An early Christmas present

During the run up to Christmas the squeaky shoes arrived. The shoes were really beautiful in soft leather, and the interesting bit was the noise they made every time the sole was pressed on the floor, just like the noise of a dog's squeaky toy and right up Isabella's street! Immediately we put them on her little feet and checked out her reaction. She was obviously intrigued then delighted with the squeak that she could make just by putting one foot in front of the other, and she clapped her hands with a big smile! Even on the first day she was happy to walk further with her Daddy only holding one hand.

We decided to alternate a day of wearing the shoes, and a day of wearing regular shoes, so that Isabella didn't become too accustomed to only walking when she received the squeak. She had never before tolerated wearing shoes for long but with the arrival of the squeaky shoes all that changed, and not only was she happy to keep these shoes on, but now her other shoes too.

Nothing changed much for a week or so only plenty of foot-stamping especially in the high chair, making maximum squeaks! We would take Isabella out of her pushchair on walks and encourage her to walk more and more outside the home. And with every step there was always the inevitable squeak, and looks of interest from other people. This noise making ability gave her a new found confidence. She wore her shoes wherever she went, at home, nursery or the supermarket, she was the cool girl who squeaked and it brought her many admirers, which naturally she loved!

The breakthrough

Three weeks later the day came when something just clicked. Isabella set off on the terrace and didn't stop, and she hasn't done since! For a period of about four months she had been ready to walk but just couldn't get the confidence to make the break. The shoes had sparked her motivation, and now a further five weeks on from taking those first proper steps, she has not looked back! **Liz**

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Motivating Eve

My daughter Eve is 14 months old and while quite confident pulling herself up to stand if holding onto the sofa or chair, and walking around furniture, she was very reluctant to walk. If we tried to encourage her to walk with us holding her hands she would cry and lift her legs in the air for us to take her weight. No matter what encouragement we offered, trying to walk holding her hands would reduce her to tears and she'd drop to the floor and crawl off as quickly as possible! We felt quite frustrated and slightly worried that our little girl who seemed so steady on her feet when holding onto furniture, wouldn't make this next step.

We spoke to our ophthalmologist about this. Eve's visual impairment means she has a very narrow field of vision and can see only about 6 feet or so in front of her. We were reassured that walking would come, but that given Eve's visual difficulties it was understandable that she felt nervous about walking into the unknown and that until she felt very confident with her standing balance she wouldn't be persuaded to walk.

When the squeaky shoes arrived for Eve to try she was like a different baby. She put a foot to the floor and heard the squeak and was amazed at the noise. As she moved her feet it dawned on her that she was making these squeaks! I took her hands and we tried walking together. To my amazement she walked happily along the hall holding my hands. My husband also had a go walking with her with the same success. The funniest part was the speed that she now wanted to go to get maximum squeak feedback. Within a week Eve was keen to walk everywhere with us and very happy holding just one hand. She was even happy when wearing her ordinary non-squeaking shoes. She's still not ready to walk alone, but she's started to use her free hand to trail and explore items as we pass. We're confident that she'll now have the motivation to take those first steps soon. **Fiona**

The squeaky shoes trialed by Isabella and Eve were generously provided.