

Ask the Experts: How to Choose a Playard

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What is a playard?

PAUL: Playards, formerly known as “playpens,” are a great way to keep your baby close in a safe, comforting environment. Portable playards allow you to bring that security and comfort everywhere you go, especially homes or places you may not consider “baby proof.” Some parents even use playards as a second nursery in the home.

FEDERICO: It is an important piece of baby gear that, for many families, has become a replacement for the classic crib and changing table. It is foldable and transportable, making it ideal for taking along when traveling with the baby. Some units have wheels that make transportation easier.

NATE: They often come with other accessories, such as a diaper changing surface, bassinet, or toys to entertain baby and/or make Mom’s life more convenient.

JENNY: Playards are considered “gear.” Portable and easy to use, they are great for trips to the grandparents and/or vacations, and safer than what might be available at a hotel.

BPE: You may also see them listed as “play yards.”

I already have a bassinet and a crib.

Why do I need a playard?

FEDERICO: Playards are transportable and can be more easily moved from room to room or house to house than a crib. They are also more versatile than a bassinet or crib.

NATE: A playard is often more convenient to use in other areas of the house besides the baby’s room. It will also be something you can fold up and take with you when you are travelling with your baby. That’s something you can’t do with a crib or bassinet.

JESSICA: Most parents use a playard in the living room for a safe spot to keep baby close by. They also use them as changing stations, so they don’t have to go to the nursery for every diaper change. Unlike a bassinet or crib, they can go on day trips or even extended trips with family so that baby has a dedicated familiar spot.

What are the most common uses for a playard?

JESSICA: We hear a lot of parents say, “My [playard] is my best friend,” or, “I couldn’t live without my [playard]!” The reason parents make such strong remarks referencing their packnplays is because playards are so versatile – talk about multifunction! They are both in-home and away-from-home baby stations, and some can grow with baby. They are a safe spot for baby to nap and play, and for mom and dad to change baby without running all the way to the nursery.

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How do I choose the one that's right for me?

JENNY: Fashion tends to be the important factor for many, as almost all playards do the same basic functions. Like many baby gear items, think about how you will use it based on your lifestyle. For example, when we had one with our kids we knew we would not use it at home and really only planned on it for sleeping, so we were not interested in models with some of the cool extra features. While these features can be very helpful it wasn't the right thing for us.

NATE: To choose your playard, you need to begin with understanding how you want to use the playard. If you will be travelling to Grandma's house and would like to have a playard to take with you, then you will want to look for lightweight, portable units. If you want to use the playard as fully functioning "Baby Station" for changing diapers and playing, then you will want to identify products that have the accessories that fit your needs. There are many, many options for purchasing playards, so the key to choosing the one that's right for you is to start with fully understanding how you want to use it.

FEDERICO: Think of what you need a playard to do. Will it be assembled and disassembled weekly to travel to grandma? Does it need to serve as a changing table? Will it replace a crib full time? Then narrow down your search based on the features that are most important to you.

What age/weight of child can a playard hold?

JENNY: Most bassinet features on playards can be used for babies weighing up to approximately 15 lbs. The playard itself can work for babies up to approximately 30 lbs. Height also comes into play with heavier kids. The maximum height ranges from 34" to 38". The best way to tell is when the child's head approaches the point of being higher than the sides of the playard. They can either climb out or tip it over. Like any item, *read the instructions* to make sure you follow the specific guidelines of that unit.

What basic features should I look for?

FEDERICO: These days, most playard users leave their units set up full-time as crib replacements, so look for a unit with styling and fabrics that match your decor. Safety, comfort and convenience are the most important attributes of a playard. Look for JPMA certification, soft fabrics, and easy to use features.

What other features are available?

PAUL:

- **Removable Bassinet Attachment** — Used with infants under 3 months or under 15 lbs., bassinets elevate the floor of the playard to keep infants within sight and easy reach. Many parents today are using the playard bassinet for newborns, instead of purchasing a traditional bassinet.
- **Changing Table Attachment** — A convenient feature, especially when traveling, that separates the sleeping area from the changing area.
- **Parent Organizers** — Provide accessible storage for diapers, baby wipes, and more.
- **Storage Options** — Playards come with a wide range of storage options from simple mesh pockets to enclosed secure compartments with shelving. If you plan to travel often or use the playard far from the baby's room, you may want to look for extra storage.
- **Electronics** — Whether it is soothing vibrations, music, nature sounds or a check light, playard electronics can provide a world of entertainment to comfort and soothe baby.

NATE: There are a myriad of options available for playards. From music boxes and toy bars to soothing vibration and sun shade canopies, the key is having a clear understanding of what you want your playard to do, and then finding the playard that can do it.

What are the most important safety features I should look for?

JENNY: There aren't any specific safety features to look for other than it meets industry safety standards. It is most important to read the instructions to ensure you are using the unit properly.

NATE: You may want to watch for any small openings or pinch points that could pinch your little one's fingers, hands, etc.

Can't I just use a blanket on the floor and surround it with pillows or something?

NATE: It is not recommended to use pillows or blankets around an infant. The opportunity exists for the infant to pull a pillow on top of themselves. Playard manufacturers go to great lengths to ensure that their products are as safe as possible.

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Can I place more than one child in the playard?

ALL: No, for safety reasons, we never recommend using a playard for more than one child.

Are there any safety tips I need to consider when using a playard?

JENNY: Read operating instructions and ensure that all locking parts have locked and are functioning normally.

NATE: It is important not to leave your infant in a playard for extended periods of time unattended. Nothing is as effective as a Mom's watchful eye. You should not place blankets or pillows in the playard as an infant could pull those on top of themselves.

JESSICA: Also, never add a mattress, comforter or padding to your playard, and make sure there are no strings or cords dangling into the playard.

BPE: Be sure to follow the directions for setting up your playard, and make sure that all the latches and hinges are tight. Keep the instructions with the playard if a caregiver, such as a grandparent or babysitter, will be opening or moving it.

Are used/second-hand playards ok to use?

NATE: It is not recommended to use second-hand playards. Unfortunately, you have no way of knowing the history of that playard, and if something may be about to break and cause an unsafe situation.

JENNY: Buy new or get one from a friend who you trust. You need to be sure it has not been recalled or misused. Also, you don't know what has been spilled on it or what it has been exposed to when buying used.

BPE: You can check to see if a used playard has been recalled at the [CPCS web site](#).

How much should I expect to pay for a new playard?

NATE: There is a wide price range of playards available based on the features and functionality that come with it. The retail prices will range from as little as \$50 to as much as a few hundred.

BPE: Visit a [Baby Product Experts affiliated store](#) near you for more expert advice on selecting the best playard for your needs.



Baby Product Experts specialty stores provide safe, high-quality products and expert advice.