

Safe and sound

Baby monitors and stairgates can help you guard your child's wellbeing. But peace of mind need not be expensive, as our tests uncovered some great products at low prices



Your baby is in constant danger – or so some newspapers and magazines would have you believe. Parents and grandparents are bombarded with scare stories, which can intimidate you into spending a fortune on child-safety equipment.

However, as our tests show, high-priced stairgates and baby monitors aren't necessarily better or safer for your child.

Choosing from a range of child-safety equipment can be baffling, especially for first-time parents.

But expensive errors can be avoided, as we've discovered three Best Buy stairgates costing just £25, and a decent budget baby monitor: the Fisher Price Sounds 'n' Lights (5) for £20. Considering the top-priced gate we tested is £60 and the most expensive monitor is £150, that's a huge saving.



1 **BABY MONITOR**

88% BT 100 £50

This BT model is our cheapest Best Buy. It has an incredibly long range of 280m, benefiting from DECT technology, which gives crispness and clarity over the airwaves. Even though this is the simplest of the two BT models, it shares some useful features, such as a pager, with the more expensive model. Cheapest at Argos.

WORTH KNOWING The parent unit comes with rechargeable batteries, but the baby unit doesn't.

Available Argos, Mothercare Thermometer No Lullabies
3 Battery life of parent unit 17 hours Night light Yes

Baby monitors

Baby monitors allow you to listen to your child while they sleep. They provide peace of mind, rather than actual safety, but they help you know if your child is sleeping soundly. We found that all monitors were safe and met the criteria in our stringent tests – so, how do you choose the one for you?

What to look for

When it comes to buying a monitor there are several aspects to consider:

- range (if you have a big house or spend a lot of time in the garden)
- quality of basic features
- the number of optional extras.

Some features such as belt clips and sound sensitive lights are standard and useful, while others, such as sensor mats or crib soothers, aren't vital and may give you extra sleepless nights. Also be aware of channel options – in general, the more channels, the better.

Analogue signals aren't as clear as digital, but both types can be picked up by other people's monitors, radios or cordless telephones. DECT (digital enhanced cordless telecommunications) models should not have this problem, as scanning equipment is needed to listen to such signals. See 'Features explained', right, for more.

FEATURES EXPLAINED

■ BATTERIES

Rechargeable batteries are the cheaper option in the long run. Some come with the unit and can be charged in the cradle. Other models explicitly say you can't use them, as they may cause the unit to malfunction and void the warranty.

■ BATTERY INDICATOR

This warns you when the batteries are about to run out.

■ CRIB SOOTHER

Gentle vibrations can be activated to try to soothe your baby.

■ **INTERCOM/TALKBACK** This allows you to talk back to your baby.



■ LULLABY

TRIGGER A calming lullaby can be activated if your baby stirs. The effectiveness of this will depend on the individual baby. Some models allow you to record your own.

■ MOTION

SENSOR MAT Green lights flash and a tick is heard every time your baby moves. If your baby stops moving for more than 20 seconds, an alarm sounds and red lights flash. Can be unnecessarily distressing.

■ **MULTI-CHANNEL OPTIONS** Two channels should be adequate, but the option of more channels will lessen the chance of interference.

■ NIGHT LIGHT

This gives the area around the unit a soft glow, which may comfort your baby and can help you see them in a darkened room (see picture, right).

■ **OUT-OF-RANGE ALARM** If you wander out of range, an alarm sounds.

■ **PAGER** Press a button on the baby unit and follow the bleeping to your lost parent unit.

■ **THERMOMETER** Displays the room's temperature.

■ **TEMPERATURE ALARM** Warns you when the temperature goes outside a set range. Can be with sounds and/or lights.

■ **TORCH** To check on baby without turning on the room's main light.

■ VIDEO MONITOR

To see as well as hear your baby. Two models we tested have 'night vision', so you can see your baby in the dark.

■ **SOUND-SENSITIVE LIGHTS** This allows you to 'see' when your baby is crying. The louder your baby cries, the more lights are illuminated.

■ **VOLUME WARNING** Some models will vibrate to warn you if you have the volume on your unit too low.





2 BABY MONITOR

87% BT 150 £70

The second BT Best Buy has the same range and dependability as its sister model, but will appeal to those who like gadgets. On top of the five lullabies that this model comes with, you have the option to record your own, or you can play music from an external source. It has a temperature alert, which can be set to go off if the baby's room goes below 14°C or above 23°C. It's cheapest at Argos.

WE LIKE The parent unit has a torch.

Available Argos, Mothercare **Lullabies** 5 **Thermometer** Yes **Battery life of parent unit** 21 hours **Night light** Yes



The BT 150 will appeal to those who like gadgets



3 BABY MONITOR

86% Philips Avent 499 £90

Our most expensive Best Buy has a decent range (250m) and a lot of features, including a night light, temperature alarm, and talkback and paging functions. The parent unit comes with rechargeable batteries, and it has enough battery life to get you through a long night. Cheapest at Toys R Us.

WORTH KNOWING The instruction manual is one of the biggest on test.

Available Toys R Us, Mothercare **Lullabies** 5 **Thermometer** Yes **Battery life of parent unit** 15 hours **Night light** Yes



4 BABY MONITOR

86% Philips Avent 496 £60

This is the easiest to use of the four Best Buys. It has the same long range as its more expensive sister monitor (3), but the battery life on the parent unit, at only 10 hours, lets it down. The monitor performs all the basics well and is extremely straightforward with few additional extras. Cheapest at Toys R Us.

WE LIKE This monitor has a two-year guarantee (most have only one year).

Available Toys R Us, Mothercare **Lullabies** 0 **Thermometer** No **Battery life of parent unit** 10 hours **Night light** Yes



USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. If we couldn't find them at major high-street retailers, we

give the most common online price. Prices for other models are a guide. **Battery (baby)/(parent)** Number of hours the disposable batteries lasted before they ran out. **Range in open air** The maximum distance a parent and

baby unit can be apart without the signal breaking up.

Test performance **Range** Based on readings taken in open air, a typical modern house and a typical Victorian house. **Basic features**

How well features such as sound-sensitive lights work. **Sound** Based on clarity and volume. **Interference** Models are marked down if they suffer from interference from neighbouring units or a mobile phone.

Ease of use How easy the units are to set up and operate, and clarity of instructions.

Score Ignores price, is based on: Total performance and durability **65%**
Ease of use **35%**

MODEL	SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	BATTERY (BABY)	BATTERY (PARENT)	RANGE IN OPEN AIR (m)	RANGE	BASIC FEATURES	SOUND	INTERFERENCE	EASE OF USE	
BABY MONITORS										
1 BT Baby Monitor 100	50	20	17	280	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	88
2 BT Baby Monitor 150	70	18	21	280	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	87
3 PHILIPS AVENT 499	90	19	15	250	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	86
4 PHILIPS AVENT 496	60	18	10	250	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	86
5 FISHER PRICE Sounds 'n' Lights	20	n/a ^a	37	125	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	83
6 TOMMEE TIPPEE SureSound Ultimate	110	21	28	105	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	83
7 TOMY Walkabout Platinum Digital	100	19	n/a ^b	80	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	83
8 TOMMEE TIPPEE SureSound Classic	35	22	34	90	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	82
9 SUMMER INFANT Digital Video Monitor ^c	150	n/a ^a	n/a ^d	120	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	74
10 NSCESSITY Camera monitor	130	12	7	40	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	66

^a Power cord ^b Tested differently because rechargeable batteries only. Batteries lasted 9.5 hours ^c Comes with cot soother ^d Tested differently because rechargeable batteries only. Batteries lasted 9.5 hours

Stairgates

A stairgate is a must for anyone with a toddler. While a gate is mainly used to prevent inquisitive children from climbing stairs and hurting themselves, gates can also be used for sectioning off areas like the kitchen, making the house safer.

You'll need a stairgate from the first time a baby starts toddling, and you should ideally have gates at both the top and bottom of your staircase. With three £25 Best Buys,

childproofing the stairs doesn't have to make much of a dent in your wallet.

One of the key problems with some stairgates is that they can be difficult to set up. Fortunately, our four Best Buys are easy to use, but we found the Kiddy Guard barrier (11) quite tricky, particularly for those with less than nimble fingers.

For more, see 'Guide to fittings', right, and for buying advice, see 'Checklist', opposite.

GUIDE TO FITTING

■ SCREWS

This fitting is anchored to the wall with metal screws. Good for use at the top of stairs as there is no frame, so no tripping hazard.

PROS It is probably the sturdiest fitting type.

CONS Leaves at least four holes in your wall.



■ PRESSURE

This gate or barrier is held in place by pressure at four points. Some have a disc that you rotate by hand, others are fitted using a spanner. The gate sits in a frame that doesn't move.

PROS Better for your walls.

CONS Frame is a trip hazard.

■ PRESSURE (MESH BARRIERS)

Doesn't sit in a frame, and completely comes away from the wall when you release the pressure.

Useful for travel but inconvenient for daily use as difficult to assemble.

PROS No wall damage, quick to remove.

CONS Tricky to set up.



USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. If we couldn't find them at major high-street retailers, we give the most common online price. Prices for other

models are a guide. Go to www.whichcompare.co.uk for the latest prices.

Type G = gate, B = barrier.

Build WB = wooden bar, MB = metal bar, FM = fabric mesh, PM = plastic mesh. **Fixing** P = pressure, S = screw.

Width The maximum width across which the gate can be used safely (including extensions, so

you can bridge a wider gap).

Test performance

Features Presence of basic features such as: ability to open both ways, self closing, pressure gauges and whether you can open it with one hand. **Ease of installation** Gate doesn't extend beyond its safe width, can

cope with poor alignment (for example, if there are skirting boards) to prevent incorrect or dangerous installation.

Ease of assembly

★★★★★ means the gate is easy to assemble and fit in place fast, with clear instructions.

Convenience Includes ease of opening and closing, as well as trip

hazards. **Safety** The gates were tested according to British Standard BS EN 1930: 2000.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:

Safety	50%
Convenience	20%
Ease of installation	20%
Features	10%

MODEL	SPECIFICATION					WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	TYPE	BUILD	FIXING	WIDTH (cm)	FEATURES	EASE OF INSTALLATION	EASE OF ASSEMBLY	CONVENIENCE	SAFETY	
STAIRGATES											
1 LINDAM Easy Fit Alarm	25	G	MB	P	81	★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	78
2 BABYDAN Flexi Fit Metal	25	G	MB	S	109	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	77
3 BABYDAN Flexi Fit Wood	30	G	WB	S	110	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	77
4 IKEA Patrull Fast	25	G	WB	S	110	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	75
5 MOTHERCARE Wall Fix Extending Gate	20	G	MB	S	102	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	74
6 IKEA Patrull Smidig	20	G	MB	P	86	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	73
7 BABYDAN Gate ToGo	25	B	FM	P	92	★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★★	71
8 MOTHERCARE Easy Fix Gate To Go	25	B	FM	P	92	★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★★	71
9 MOTHERCARE Wall Fix Swing Shut	30	G	MB	P	79	★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★★	70
10 LINDAM Easy Fit Wood & Metal	30	G	WB	P	80	★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	69
11 KIDDY GUARD Kiddy Guard	60	G	PM	S	130	★★★★	★	★★	★★	★★★★★★	68



78% Lindam Easy Fit Alarm £25

This pressure-fit gate achieved excellent results in our safety tests, as well as being quick and easy to assemble – taking us only five minutes.

For added security, the gate comes with an alarm that sounds as soon as the gate is opened.

One drawback is that the catch is quite thick and is tricky for small adult hands to squeeze and unfasten. It's cheapest at Boots.

WE LIKE It has adjustable gate stops, so you can change which way it opens.

Available Boots Type Gate Build Metal Fixing Pressure Width 81cm



77% BabyDan Flexi Fit Metal £25

This isn't the easiest gate to assemble but gets an excellent safety score, which is the key factor. It's a screw-fitting gate, and it comes with

paper templates so you can get the position right before you start drilling.

The opening mechanism is also impressive – adults should find it easy to open with one hand. It's cheapest at John Lewis.

WE LIKE As our best screw-fitting gate, it's perfect for the top of the stairs.

Available John Lewis Type Gate Build Metal Fixing Screw Width 109cm



The BabyDan Flexi Fit Wood is a good choice for the top of the stairs



77% BabyDan Flexi Fit Wood £30

This is the wooden version of the metal BabyDan (2). Apart from the material, the differences are minimal – for example, the wooden version is slightly larger than the metal one.

It's a good choice for the top of the stairs, particularly if you want your safety equipment to blend in with wooden features and banisters. Cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING This gate opens only one way, so you need to pick a direction before you fit it.

Available John Lewis Type Gate Build Wood Fixing Screw Width 110cm



75% Ikea Patruell Fast £25

This Ikea gate is very safe and is worth picking up if you happen to be in the Swedish superstore. It comes with clear, simple instructions, and the assembly diagrams are also easy to follow. Assembly itself is a little fiddly – it took us more than 25 minutes to fit this gate, while others took as few as five.

WORTH KNOWING It is possible to save money on this gate by using a free 'Ikea Family' membership card. The gate will cost £18.75 – a saving of £6.25.

Type Gate Build Wood Fixing Screw Width 110cm



Checklist

When buying and fitting a stairgate, it's best to do some preparation

■ **Measure up** Always check the width between walls at the top and bottom. Skirting boards may make this gap smaller.

■ **Fittings** Decide in advance if you want a temporary or permanent fitting (see 'Guide to fitting', opposite).

■ **Material** Make sure you can drill into walls/skirting boards/banisters or door frames.

Most gates come only with wood screws, so you may need to buy masonry screws.

■ **Number** Take into account rooms without doors, such as the kitchen, as well as on the top and bottom of stairs

■ **Safety check** If you fit a gate at the top of stairs, make sure it opens towards you, not over the stair.

A PARENT'S BEST FRIEND

Baby and Toddler Essentials

To buy a copy at £9.99 with free p&p (RRP £10.99), call 01903 828557 and quote BTW0908 and ISBN 978 1 84490 035 0 or visit www.which.co.uk/books. Closing date 30 September 2008.



OUR RESEARCH

When selecting stairgates and baby monitors to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then check availability on the high street and online. Tested models include top sellers from the most popular brands, models from some lesser-known brands and a selection of bargain brands.

Contacts

BT 0808 100 6554; www.bt.com

BabyDan 01704 898110; www.babydan.com

Fisher Price 01628 50303
www.fisher-price.co.uk

Ikea Family www.ikea.co.uk

Kiddy Guard 01730 895761
www.cheeckyrascals.co.uk

Lindam 0870 118118; www.lindam.com

Mamas & Papas 0845 268 2000
www.mamasandpapas.co.uk

Mothercare 0845 330 4070
www.mothercare.co.uk

Philips Avent 0800 289064; www.avent.com

NSCessity 01483 428989; www.nscosity.co.uk

Summer Infant 020 8420 4429;
www.summerinfant.co.uk

Tomme Tippee 0500 979899
www.tommeetippee.co.uk

Tomy 023 8066 2600; www.tomy.co.uk