

Going Shopping

Shopping can be an enjoyable activity for the whole family. It can also be difficult, especially when children misbehave. Preschoolers may whine, touch things without permission, run in the aisles, get lost, have tantrums or demand that their parents buy them things. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your preschooler to behave responsibly on shopping trips.

Teaching children new behaviour and skills takes time and effort at first, but will make shopping trips easier and more enjoyable in the long term. To make a start, plan a series of short practice shopping trips spending about 5 minutes in a shop. Leave longer shopping trips until your child can manage shorter ones.

WHY DO CHILDREN MISBEHAVE ON SHOPPING TRIPS?

Most preschoolers get tired quickly and can become irritable and disruptive. This can happen when parents have lots of shopping to do and expect their child to be patient for too long.

Preschoolers may find shopping boring. It can seem to them that the trip takes forever, particularly if they have nothing to do. When children are not involved in the shopping trip and have little to do, they are more likely to misbehave.

Attractive items placed at child level do not make shopping any easier for parents. Some preschoolers can get excited when they are surrounded by lots of colours, lights and interesting things. They can also have difficulty accepting that they cannot have everything they want.

If children are ignored when they behave responsibly, and only get attention when they become disruptive, problems are likely to occur more often.

Sometimes parents stop taking their children on shopping trips because they misbehave. If children are not given opportunities to learn how to behave responsibly on shopping trips, it is likely that the problem behaviour will continue.

HOW TO HELP PREVENT PROBLEMS ON SHOPPING TRIPS

▼ Maintain Your Child's Routine

Take your child shopping at times when they are most likely to enjoy it, not

during usual sleep or meal times when they are likely to be tired or hungry.

▼ Prepare Your Child for the Trip

Before you all leave home, tell your child where you will be going, what you will be buying and when you will be back. Answer any questions about the trip.

▼ Explain the Rules

Decide on two or three simple rules for shopping trips and discuss them with your child. After a while your preschooler will be able to say what the rules are. Ideally, rules should tell your child what to do rather than what not to do. Here are some examples:

- Stay close to Mum or Dad.
- Do as you are asked.
- Walk down aisles.
- Speak in a pleasant voice.
- Ask before you touch.

Before you get to the shops, ask your child to tell you the rules — *So, what rules do you have to remember while we are shopping?* Praise them if they tell you. If your child does not say the rules, calmly remind them.



If there were problems last time you went shopping, briefly and calmly describe one rule your child forgot to follow — *Last time we went shopping, you forgot our rule about staying close to Mummy.* Tell your child what you would like them to do differently this time — *Today, let's see if you can stay close to Mummy.*

▼ Talk About Rewards

For the first few shopping trips, you may like to reward your child for following the rules. Tell your child what they can earn if they follow the rules while you are shopping. Suggested rewards include going to the park, special time with Mum or Dad, or a coin-operated ride when you have finished shopping.

▼ Talk About Consequences

Decide ahead of time exactly how to deal with problem behaviour. Tell your child what will happen if the rules are broken. Explain how you will use quiet time (see over).

▼ Plan Some Activities

It may also be useful for you to think of some suitable things for your child to do. Some interesting activities for your child to do while shopping include:

- Finding things on the shelves.
- Passing things to you.
- Counting purchases.
- Putting things in the trolley for you.
- Finding prices.
- Spotting different colours, shapes and sizes of items.

HOW TO MANAGE SHOPPING TRIPS

▼ Keep Your Child Busy

As soon as you arrive at the shops, involve your child in what you are doing. Talk to them about decisions you are making and try some of the activities listed above.

▼ Encourage Desirable Behaviour

When your child is behaving well and following the rules, give them lots of attention. Praise your child — *Maria, you are walking down the aisles really well today.* Help them get started on a new activity if they are losing interest in what they are doing. Do this before problems occur.

▼ If Misbehaviour Occurs, Tell Your Child What To Do

If your child misbehaves or breaks a rule, act straight away. Tell your child what to stop doing — *Sarah, stop stamping your feet* — and what to do instead — *Walk quietly.* Praise your child if they do as you ask.

▼ Back Up Your Instruction With Quiet Time

If your child does not do as you have asked or breaks the rule again, use quiet time. Tell your child what they have done wrong — *You have not done as I asked* — and the consequence — *Now it's quiet time.* Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them be quiet for a short time. Tell your child to stand quietly in the aisle. Wait for about 30 seconds of quiet before you start shopping again.

If your child begins to whine loudly, yell or throw a tantrum, you may need to leave your shopping and take your child outside the shop. Find a safe place for your child to sit, such as a seat outside the shop or in your car. Tell your child they must sit quietly. Wait beside them. Do not talk to or look at your child.

▼ Continue the Shopping Trip

When your child has been quiet for about 30 seconds, continue the shopping trip. Praise your child as soon as they behave well again. If misbehaviour occurs again, use quiet time again. You may need to repeat quiet time several times before your child stops misbehaving. Be prepared for mixed reactions from other shoppers. For your child's sake, be consistent and back up your instructions.

▼ Review the Shopping Trip

As you are leaving, tell your child what you liked about their behaviour during the shopping trip — *Alex, I was really happy with you today. You stayed close to Mummy the whole time.* If your child followed the rules, praise them and give them the reward you agreed on before the trip. If problems occurred, do not give the reward. Briefly and calmly describe one rule your child forgot to follow — *You forgot our rule about asking before you*

touch things. Set a goal for your next shopping trip — *Next time let's see if you can follow our rule about touching.* Remember you only touch things if Mum or Dad says you can.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

If your child does not quieten down in quiet time at the shops, you can use delayed time-out as a last resort. Go home and take your child straight to time-out. Time-out involves taking your child to an uninteresting but safe room or space and having them be quiet for a short time. Tell your child why they are going to time-out and that they must be quiet before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry. When your child has been quiet for 2 minutes let them out of time-out. Watch for them behaving well and praise them as soon as possible.

KEY STEPS

- At first, keep shopping trips short and frequent.
- Try not to disrupt your child's usual sleeping and eating routines.
- Remind your child of the rules for shopping.
- Talk about rewards and consequences.
- Keep your child busy while you are shopping.
- Praise and reward your child for following the rules.
- Act as soon as misbehaviour occurs.
- Tell your child what to do.
- Back up your instruction with quiet time.
- Continue the shopping trip.
- Review the shopping trip with your child.

As your child learns to behave responsibly on shopping trips, you will not need to remind them of the rules,

FOR FURTHER HELP See the Positive Parenting booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet.

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

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rewards and consequences each time you go shopping. Even though you will discuss the rules less often, they will still apply. Use consequences consistently if the rules are broken. Gradually make rewards less predictable by giving them every now and then. Continue to praise your child for behaving responsibly on shopping trips.

IF PROBLEMS PERSIST

Here is another strategy you can try:

- Explain to your child that they can earn a stamp or sticker every 2 minutes or for every aisle passed, if they follow the rules.
- Tell your child that these stamps or stickers can earn a special reward at the end of the shopping trip.
- Decide how many stamps or stickers your child must earn to get the reward and what the reward will be. Tell your child what they can earn if they reach the goal.
- Tell your child what consequences will apply if they break the rules.
- Get everything ready before you go shopping. You will need a small self-inking stamp or a sheet of small stickers such as stars or dots.
- If your child follows the rules, put a stamp or sticker on the back of their hand or a piece of paper at the agreed times. Praise your child for following the rules.
- Deal with problem behaviour as suggested earlier.
- When you have finished shopping, count the number of stamps or stickers your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.
- If your child does not reach the goal, do not give them the reward. However, do not criticise them or take away stickers they have earned.
- When your child is reaching the goal easily, start to phase out the rewards by making them harder to achieve. Gradually increase the number of stamps or stickers your child must earn to get the reward. Then gradually increase the time your child must follow the rules before earning a sticker until you only give stamps or stickers at the end of the shopping trip, then not at all.
- Continue to use consequences consistently if your child misbehaves or breaks a rule.
- Continue to praise your child for behaving responsibly on shopping trips.