

Managing Your Child's Public Behavior

*Staying Sane During Public Outings
with Your Child*

Dr. John Carosso, Psy.D.,
Child Psychologist
724-787-0497
cpcwecare.com

Managing Your Child's Public Behavior

Public outings with your child can be quite challenging and demanding. Children sometimes find the environment to be over-stimulating, and want to carry-out the outing 'on their terms' rather than on yours. However, if you plan in advance, there are some strategies to improve the situation and make the outing more tolerable, if not pleasurable. Here are some tips:

Prepare and Practice

- Just like anything else, this is a skill that is learned over time
- Role play at home
- Short stints to the market; increase exposure; daily outings (in and out, but longer over time). Brief stint at local deli, then to restaurant...
- Agree on rules prior to leaving
- Clear explanation of where going, expectations, and rewards (or consequences)
- Clear guidelines: what will happen, where you'll go, what they will do (park, walk, go to a particular store, ride in cart, take a snack break...) and how long it will take. Remind them of where you are in the plan as you shop.
- Provide clear direction on how to behave well: hold hand, stay close, frequently tell them how they're doing.
- Prepare well in advance: Visual schedule
- Show photos ahead of time of where you're going
- Develop Social Stories about public outings
- Limit how often, length, and where you shop
- Bring along favorite toys, food, familiar item
- Not tired or hungry (either of you) Issue of irritability and 'wants'
- Keep trips short, take breaks, and use a stroller
- Ask psychologist to prescribe accommodations at Park
- Get child involved in the shopping (ask questions, child can help find items - keep child occupied).
- Give child money to make their own purchases.
- Avoid tempting places (practice in the meat department), or keep in small doses

Managing Your Child's Public Behavior

- Be careful of your own attitude and fatigue (keep upbeat, happy...)
- Go at off-hours (5-7 PM or early in the AM on early in the week). Know the store layout in advance (bathrooms, food, water fountain, babysitting...).
- Have another adult with you.
- Take along a wish list. When he sees something he can't have, add to wish list. Share enthusiasm for desired items.

Many children find busy supermarkets to be stimulating, if not over-stimulating. Here are some things to think about:

Over-Stimulation

- Simply too overloading for some children (Chuckie-Cheeses...)
- Brushing and compression
- Take breaks / short stints
- Noise Reducing headphones
- Redirect to details
- Deep breaths; count to ten
- Avoid long lines, large crowds, noisy environments
- Don't push the limits
- At times it's best to simply not take your child
- Problems to Target:
 - Boredom
 - Overstimulation
 - Hunger
 - Fatigue (tough for those little legs to keep-up)
 - Problem behavior can be a form of communication.

Behavior management is the key; remain consistent and remember that what works at home, will often work in public as well. Here are some tips:

Behavioral Approaches

- Be consistent with behavior management in all settings (between home, school, community)

Managing Your Child's Public Behavior

- Reinforce good behavior (you get what you praise; and be specific in your praise)
- Intervene and make eye contact as soon as a misbehavior occurs; redirect to replacement behavior.
- Use time-out in the store. Take a break outside the store. Avoid losing your cool. However, does not need to be a "punishment" but, rather, a time outside the store to calm

Here are some tips to effectively redirect your child to what you *want* him/her to do, rather than what you don't want:

Distraction and Redirect

- Tell them what *to do*, not what not to do
- 1-2-3 Magic
- Have a plan ahead of time; always have a Plan B.
- Remove to private place to discipline
- Give choices (stand beside me or stop at the end of the aisle)
- Get eye contact before giving a direction
- Make a game of shopping (What cereal is in the yellow box; I spy)
- Stores are like over-sized classrooms that just happen to sell things
 - count the number of items you need
 - find the items based on color or size
 - make a list at home, and have child help find the items
 - Name the foods in the cart, how they can be used, where they came from
 - Use all senses; notice smells, texture, differences in color
 - Older children can request paper or plastic; give coupons...

People sometimes find it necessary to put-in their 'two-cents'; here are some ways to deal with that frustration:

Dealing with Other's Judgements

- Autism Awareness Cards (explains autism and how to be supportive)

Managing Your Child's Public Behavior

- "My child is autistic, what's your problem?"
- T-shirt; I have autism; be nice to my Mom
- Simply ignore
- Find some merit in their complaint (child making noise in a restaurant...)
- Keep it in perspective (all kids freak sometimes in stores; it's kinda funny sometimes)

Safety First

- Never leave child alone unsupervised in car.
- Name tag.
- Some parents have some success using a harness and tethering device ("leash") that can be used in more extreme situations where safety is an issue. However, important to 'fade' off the leash for increasing periods of time while using high levels of reinforcement, ie. Praise, stickers....)
- Service K-9
- Take risks but investigate and prepare ahead of time
- Have plan in case separated
- Keep child close (hold hands or the cart, or steer the cart, or hang on cart)