

# Tips for shopping with children

Here are some tips for avoiding stress and making shopping trips more manageable, whether you're buying groceries or in the mall buying shoes.

## Before you go

- ◆ **List needs (things you must have) and wants (things you can do without or get later).** Plan to by the needs first and the wants last, depending on your child's mood and the time available.
- ◆ **Develop a budget.** Know how much you can spend, and stick to it.
- ◆ **Choose a secret word or hand signal that you and your child can use to get the other's attention.** Have a different word or signal for "stop right now" and "come here." Use them sparingly, so they won't lose their effect.
- ◆ **Explain the rules beforehand.** Some examples, "I expect you to sit in the basket while I push." "Stay close to me." "We walk, not run, in the store."
- ◆ **Decide on realistic consequences for breaking the rules.** For example, "If you stand up in the basket, we're going to stop until you sit down," and "If you run or yell in the store, we're going to leave." Be prepared to follow through.
- ◆ **Role-play the shopping trip at home.** "Let's pretend we're going to buy shoes," you might say. Demonstrate how you speak to the clerk, get measured, try on shoes, and pay. Show how you expect your child to behave. Make it fun.
- ◆ **Choose a time for shopping when you and your child are not hungry or tired.** Wear comfortable shoes and clothes.
- ◆ **If you need to stop at a store for a last-minute item, check attitudes and energy levels.** Is your child too tired, hungry, or cranky? Are you? If so, can you postpone the trip or find a sitter?
- ◆ **Prepare properly for the trip by anticipating your child's needs.** For an infant, you will need clean diapers and a bottle of water. For preschoolers, you might bring a nutritious snack or a favorite blanket or toy for security. You might consider bringing a storybook and pad and pencil to help keep your child from getting bored.

## While you shop

- ◆ **Allow the child to participate in the shopping as much as possible.** If you're in a grocery store, you might let the child help choose the apples or jug of milk. Giving

children a say in decision-making helps them feel powerful and competent.

- ◆ **Talk with your child while making selections.** Identify items by name ("This is an eggplant.") and ask questions ("What shape is this cereal box?"). Talking not only keeps children from getting bored but also expands their vocabulary and thinking skills.
- ◆ **Play simple games as you shop;** for example, "Who can see the shoe store first?" and "Let's see how many Bs you can find in signs."
- ◆ **Anticipate potential problem situations, and avoid them.** If your child whines for red soda, avoid the beverage aisle. If your child usually gets cranky while waiting in the check-out line, plan to tell a story—or quietly sing a favorite song.
- ◆ **Avoid giving in to your child's requests to keep the peace.** If your child has a tantrum when you say *no* to buying candy, tell the clerk you're having a problem, and step outside with your child until calm returns. Staying firm, even though you lose your place in line, helps your child learn more responsible behavior. It also means few problems for you in the long run.
- ◆ **Avoid responding to unacceptable behavior with threats.** Saying "I'm going home without you" can create a long-lasting fear of abandonment and show up as serious problems in later childhood.
- ◆ **Keep your child firmly in hand at all times.** Don't let the child out of your sight. If you get separated, go directly to the manager or security guard, and ask for help.

## After you finish

- ◆ **As you drive or walk home, talk with your child about the experience.** "What did you like most? What did you like least?" Emphasize how much you value your child's presence: "I love being with you." This kind of statement boosts a child's self esteem.
- ◆ **Encourage your child to help you carry and put away unbreakable and nontoxic items.** "I'd appreciate your help in carrying this sack of broccoli," you might say. Such responsibilities help children feel competent and encourage them to contribute to family tasks.
- ◆ **Take a few minutes when you return home to attend to the child's immediate needs.** A glass of apple juice, a lullaby and nap, a story or game, and a hug help you and your child get settled before tackling the next chore.