

Dealing with Your Child in Public Places

When children have behavior problems, it can be hard to take them places like the grocery store or a restaurant. Sometimes children do things that embarrass us in front of others, like yelling or talking back, or even having a full-blown temper tantrum.

Sometimes telling children to stop just makes things worse. Strangers may stare or even make comments, and you may feel like you just want to get finished and leave as quickly as possible. So sometimes children get away with things in public that they would not be allowed to do at home.

When parents are busy trying to get things done, they sometimes forget to praise their child for good behavior during an outing. But taking the time to give labeled praise means you will spend less time dealing with difficult behavior. Here are some other things to do to help your child behave in public.



Make a Plan Before You Leave the House

Set up the first (or first few) outings as practice for yourself! Plan an outing when you have nothing you must get done except teaching your child the behaviors that you want to see. Think ahead about the kinds of behaviors you want to give attention to, especially the positive opposites, and what labeled praises you want to use. It is a good idea to start with outings that are easiest for you and your child.

- Tell your child where you are going, and how you want your child to act.
 - ☺ *"We are going to walk to the park. I want you to stay right beside me on the sidewalk, and keep hold of my pocket while we walk."*
- You can also help your child behave by planning activities that keep children occupied during outings, such as crossing items off the grocery list, playing games like "I spy something red," or letting her help you put items in the grocery cart.
- Plan activities so your child won't be bored. It is useful to take a small bag of toys to keep your child occupied in places where children must be quiet or still, like in church or at a movie.
- Before practicing the time-out procedure the first time in public, explain to your child that if needed, you are going use time out in public.



During the Outing

- Look for positive opposites to praise during your outing
 - ☺ *"Thank you for using your indoor voice"*
 - ☺ *"You are walking so nicely beside me."*
- It is important to tell your child the reason for the rules you set for the outing.
 - ☺ *"It is important to be quiet in the movie so other people can hear."*
- Don't push your child too hard. Most children cannot be good in public for more than a couple of hours (and less for some). If you see that your child is getting tired, hungry, or bored, it is a good idea to go home or at least take a break. Try not to take your child out past his bedtime or during times that he is usually taking a nap.
- Be sure to plan some part of your trip that will be fun for your child. For example, if you are at the mall, you could walk through a store your child enjoys, like a pet store or toy store. Even though this takes more of your time, it will give your child something to look forward to and help him act better.
- At the end of the outing, you can give lots of praise for those good behaviors (and give no attention to any problem behaviors that happened).
 - ☺ *"You stayed right by me today in the store. It was fun to shop with you."*

The Public Time-Out Procedure

- Public time out is the same as time out at home, with a few small changes.
- Keep a small blanket or placemat with you to use as the "time-out chair," so that time out can be done anywhere.
- When you need to choose a time out spot, choose an out of the way place where there is nothing fun to do.
- At this point in PCIT, children rarely get off the "chair," but you need to have a back-up place in mind. Some parents have used a bathroom in a store, or the front steps during church. When their car is close, some parents find they can put the child in the back seat while they lean against the car, keeping in mind safety precautions such as having the window cracked.

Always watch your child during time out.