

## Grocery Shopping With Your Child

### Introduction

Having a child accompany you while grocery shopping is an ordinary event, yet grocery stores can easily trigger disruptive behavior. Here are some ideas you may want to consider to make this a manageable experience for you and your child:

1. **Multiple short trips** – If you usually spend thirty minutes to an hour grocery shopping once a week, you may want to consider making multiple shorter trips through the week. This will reduce the amount of time your child needs to spend in the grocery store, and may make it less likely that they will have a meltdown.
2. **Make a list** – Take a list of items you need and map it to the store layout. That way, you will be able to check items off your list, as you make your way from one end of the store to the other, without having to search through aisles and having to go back and forth. This can also be helpful if your child asks for items that you do not want to buy them. You can let them know that you are only purchasing items on the list and then allow them to add one preferred item to your grocery list before entering the store.
3. **Time your outing** – Always go shopping after your child has had a meal, and before they are too tired or sleepy. This will reduce the likelihood that they will have a tantrum for a food item or because they are too tired. If you believe your child will get hungry while shopping, you can also bring some snacks from home to tide them over. You could also go at less busy times to avoid long lines.
4. **Give your child a job** – Give your child something to do and focus on when they are grocery shopping with you. For children who are old enough, you can have them push the cart and keep their hands on the cart. You can even attach a soft scarf or material to the handle so that they can touch it for comfort while they walk around the store. For smaller children, you can place a soft liner inside the seating area of the cart to make it more comfortable. For some children, you can have them hold the shopping list and look for the items to put into the cart. Or allow them to check off the list as you go.
5. **Reinforce good choices** – You can tell your child that they will get a sticker or a small treat for making good choices. Be clear about what you expect. For example, you can tell them that you expect them to stay with you, and keep their hands on the cart. If you are going to buy something that your child really likes to eat, you can save it for the end, and use it as a reinforcement for following directions.
6. **Use prompting** – Using short prompts, such as “push cart” or “put this in the cart” can be useful as well. It may be more effective to say, “Put the candy on the shelf” rather than something like “No candy today, you know you can’t have any candy today”. It is always helpful to tell your children the things they should be doing rather than the things they should not be doing.
7. **Create a visual schedule** – You can create a visual schedule for your child, with pictures of items you want them to help find, and then have a treat for your child at the end. That way, they will look forward to getting a treat.
8. **Prepare for a tantrum** – No matter how well prepared you are, there will be times when your child will still have a tantrum at the grocery store. This is true for neuro-typical children as well. The best way to handle a tantrum is to be firm about what you need to accomplish. There are several things you can try, to prepare for tantrums:
  - Know your child’s triggers and set clear expectations: if every time you go grocery shopping, your child asks for ice cream, prepare for this. Give your child clear expectations on the behavior you want to see occurring during the shopping trip and then reinforce that appropriate behavior with ice cream.
  - Redirect your child by giving simple instructions to follow: if your child is showing signs that they are starting to engage in tantrum behavior, give them something to do that you know they are very likely to comply with! Tell them to sing their favorite song with you, show you how to count their fingers, roll the grocery cart like it’s a train, or point to items in the cart that they can name. Reinforce all compliance with some verbal praise.

### Conclusion

Remember, grocery shopping is a chore that a child will slowly get used to over time. It takes a lot of restraint for a child to keep from asking for things that they see, and this is something that they will develop as they get older. Don’t forget to praise them frequently for displaying appropriate and desirable behavior. We hope you have found this information useful. For more learning modules, go to [www.porchlighteducation.org](http://www.porchlighteducation.org).