

# Parent Resources

## Working With Your Child's Teacher

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When planning your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the coming year, your child's teacher will ask you for information in order to determine what skills to teach. You may receive a written survey, or the teacher might discuss this with you when calling to set up the IEP meeting. This is an opportunity to share behavioral concerns about your child. Inform the teacher about challenges that you face at home and in the community. By knowing what your needs are, the teacher will be better able to address skills appropriate for your child in all environments. Also, the teacher may be using positive supports in the classroom that are improving your child's behavior. The teacher can share those classroom skills with you and give you tips on how to implement them at home.

Below are a few examples of common behavior problems faced at home and in public, along with steps you can take to help your child develop better responses during such situations. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my child wait patiently while I prepare dinner in the evening?
- Is dining out in a restaurant with my family an enjoyable experience?
- Can I take my child along to the store and get my shopping done without incident?

If the answer to any of these is "no," the following tips will hopefully make things better for both you and your child.

### Preparing the evening meal at home

#### Behavior

- Your child cannot wait or entertain himself/herself while the meal is being prepared. This might involve screaming and/or grabbing everything in sight.

#### Possible causes

- Boredom
- Need for attention
- Wants to be somewhere else
- Wants to be doing something else
- Wants you to be doing something else

#### Positive support strategy

- Gather some materials to be used only during meal-preparation time.
- Let your child choose an item to play with while you are preparing the meal.
- Use a timer to remind you to check and see if your child is getting tired of the item.
- Set the timer so that your child can be successful sitting at the table and playing with the item. This could range from a minute to 10 minutes or more.

- When the timer goes off, give your child some attention. Determine if he or she wants to keep the item or would prefer a new one. Set the timer again.
- While preparing the meal, engage your child in conversation. Let him or her select part of the meal (deciding between green beans and corn).

### Dining out at a restaurant

#### Behavior

- Your child runs around the restaurant while yelling and grabbing things.

#### Possible causes

- Too many distractions
- Meal takes too long
- Too much stimulation

#### Positive support strategy

There are two different versions of this strategy depending on how your child reacts to being at the restaurant.

##### 1. Extreme situation – your child will sit only for a minute or less

- Go to the restaurant during a time that it is not busy.

- Bring along one item for your child.
- Eat inside at a quiet area that is not crowded, or sit down at an outside table.
- When your child has finished eating, it is time to go.
- Praise your child.

##### 2. Your child will sit and wait but not through an entire meal

- Go to the restaurant during a time that it is not busy.
- Bring along one item for your child.
- Eat inside at a quiet area that is not crowded, or sit down at an outside table.
- Give your child a little of his or her food at a time. For example, hold the bag of fries yourself and place two or three at a time on a napkin for your child to eat. As soon as he or she picks up the fries, place a few more on the napkin. Your child should always have some food in front of him or her.
- When your child has finished eating, it is time to go.
- Praise your child. ➔

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Slowly add time for your child to wait by giving him or her something to do or play with; do this until you have enough time to finish eating your meal. After two successful visits using one of the positive support strategies, take longer and longer to give small portions of food to your child so that he or she learns to wait for food. Then, add more items to your child's meal. Eventually, you will be able to order something and eat it there. When your child has finished, it is time to go.

### Shopping for groceries

#### Behavior

- Your child grabs things off the shelves while walking through the store.

#### Possible causes

- Too many distractions or too much stimulation
- Not interested in walking through the store
- Wants more individual attention

#### Positive support strategy

- Prepare your child for the activity. Tell a story using pictures (even if they are stick figures) about what you are getting ready to do and what the expectation will be. You could say, "We are going to the store. We will get out of the car, walk through the door and get a cart. I will get milk and bread, and you will get a box of pudding. Then we will pay and carry our sack to the car."
- Practice using very short trips. Go to the store, get a few things, let your child pick up an item and leave.
- Walk with your child holding on to the cart handle or helping to push.
- Have your child hold one item or carry a small basket for a few items.
- Make a picture list of the items your child will shop for. Let him or her take these items from the shelf and put them into the small basket. Remove the pictures from the list as you go.

- When possible, let your child choose the flavor of the item he or she is shopping for.
- Praise your child as you leave.

As your child becomes successful, gradually increase the number of items purchased on each trip.

### More ideas

In addition to the preceding situations, practice the following positive-support strategies to make a difference in the way your child responds to difficult situations:

- Increase your child's control and choices. Reinforce good choices, and add new activities.
- Praise frequently. If you ignore your child when he or she is being good, your child will get your attention by reverting to negative behaviors.
- Let your child be a helper. This provides attention to your child in a positive way and teaches something useful to him or her.
- Reinforce tasks that are attempted or done well. Any type of success should be reinforced.
- Decrease the length of activities such as sitting at dinner with the family. Begin with a length of time your child can manage. Slowly add more time, but do not rush it.

Reinforcements for your child may vary. The key is that the reinforcement should come soon after the behavior you are encouraging. Some ideas are:

- verbal praise or attention.
- immediate food reinforcements (small pieces of food that your child likes).
- activities your child enjoys. This could be visiting the ice cream store after a shopping trip or watching a favorite video after successfully following a new behavior at home.

Building good behavior lasts longer than trying to control inappropriate behavior. Developing appropriate behavior from positive behavior supports improves self-esteem and increases independence. A person can be successful in any environment if he or she has the right support.

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