

Anticipating Problems: Managing Children in Public Places

After your child has been trained to comply with commands at home, it will be easier to teach the child to do so in public places, such as stores, restaurants, shopping malls, and church. The key to managing children successfully in public places is to establish a plan that you will follow in dealing with your child *before* you go into the public place and to make sure that your child is aware of this plan. There are three to four easy rules to follow before you enter any public place:

RULE 1: SET UP THE RULES BEFORE ENTERING THE PLACE

Just before you are about to enter a public place, such as a store, STOP!!! Stand aside and let others enter the place, but don't do so until you have reviewed the important rules of conduct with your child. For instance, for a store, the rules for a young child might be: "Stand close, don't touch, and don't beg." For an older child, they might be: "Stay next to me, don't ask for anything, and do as I say." Give your child about three or four rules to follow. These should be rules that are commonly violated by the child in that particular place. After you have told the child the rules, the child is to repeat them back to you. You and your child are not to enter the place until the child has said these rules. If your child refuses to say them, warn the child that he or she will be placed in time out in the car. If the child still refuses, then return to your car and place the child in time out there for failing to comply with your request.

RULE 2: SET UP AN INCENTIVE FOR THE CHILD'S COMPLIANCE

While still standing outside the public place, tell your child what will be earned for adhering to the rules you have just specified and for behaving appropriately. For children who are on a poker chip or point system, these can be used. For children too young for those systems, take along a small bag of snack food (e.g., peanuts, raisins, pretzels, corn chips) to dispense to your child for good behavior throughout the trip. On occasion, you may wish to promise your child a purchase of some sort at the end of the trip, but this should only be done on rare occasions and for exceptionally good behavior during the trip so the child does not come to expect such a purchase as a routine part of any trip away from home. Some parents occasionally promise the child a special privilege at home after the trip. This is fine, but when possible use your chip or point system, because it allows you to reward the child immediately during the trip for good behavior.

RULE 3: SET UP YOUR PUNISHMENT FOR NONCOMPLIANCE

While still outside the public place, tell your child what the punishment will be for not following the rules or for misbehavior. In most cases, this will be the loss of points or chips for minor rule violations and the use of time out for moderate to major misbehavior or noncompliance. Do not be afraid to use the time

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out method in a public place, as it is the most effective method for teaching the child to obey rules in such places. After you have explained the punishment to the child, then you may enter the public place. Upon doing so, you should immediately do two things: Look around for a convenient time out location if you should need one, and begin attending to and praising your child for following the rules.

If you are using your poker chip or point system, you should give chips or points to your child periodically throughout the trip rather than waiting until the end to provide the reward. In addition, frequent praise and attention should be given to the child for obeying the rules.

RULE 4: GIVE YOUR CHILD AN ACTIVITY TO DO

If possible, think of some activity that your child can do or help with while in this public place so as to occupy his or her time. Part of the reason children misbehave in stores is that they have nothing constructive or helpful to do. Lack of activity gives them ample time to get into things they shouldn't or find ways to behave foolishly, often only to entertain themselves during the trip. If you are shopping, give your child activities to do to help with the shopping. Any activity you assign your child to do is better than nothing, so even if you have to make up some activity that is not totally constructive, assign something for your child to do.

IN THE PUBLIC PLACE

Once you enter the public place, identify where you will give your child time out, if necessary. Then start to reward him or her with tokens periodically for listening and obeying the rules. If your child starts to misbehave, *immediately* take away chips/points or place the child in time out. Do not repeat commands or warnings, because the child was already forewarned as to what would happen for any misbehavior. Here are some convenient time out areas in public places:

In Department Stores: Take the child to a little-used aisle and place the child facing a dull side of a display counter or a corner; take the child to the coat section and have him or her face the coat rack; use the gift wrap or credit department area where there is a dull corner; use a dull corner of a restroom; use a changing or dressing room, if nearby; use a maternity section (these are usually not very busy and there are sympathetic mothers there).

In Grocery Stores: Have the child face the side of a frozen foods counter; take the child to the farthest corner of the store; find the greeting card display and have the child face the dull side of the counter while you look at cards. It is difficult to find a time out place in most grocery stores, so you may have to use one of the alternatives to time out listed in the section that follows.

In Church: Take the child to the "crying room" often found in most churches, where mothers take irritable babies during the service; use the foyer or entryway to the church; use a restroom off the lobby of the church.

In a Restaurant: Use the restrooms. Otherwise, use one of the alternatives listed in the following section.

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When in Another's Home: Be sure to explain to your hosts that you are using a new child management method and you may need to place your child in a chair or stand the child in a dull corner somewhere if misbehavior develops. Ask them where one could be used. If this cannot be done in the other's home, then use one of the alternatives listed below.

During a Long Car Trip: Before having the child enter the car, review the rules with the child and set up your incentive. Be sure to take along games or activities for the child to do during the trip. If you need to punish the child, pull off the road to a safe stopping area and have the child serve the time out on the floor of the back seat or seated outside on a floor mat near the car. Never leave the child in the car unattended and never leave your child unsupervised if he or she is sitting outside the car.

If you use time out in a public place, the minimum sentence needs to be only one-half what it normally is at home, because time out in public places is very effective with children. Also, if the child leaves time out without permission, take away tokens or points as part of his or her token system.

IF YOU CANNOT USE TIME OUT IN THE PUBLIC PLACE

There are always a few places where placing your child in a corner for misbehavior is not possible. Here are some alternatives, but they should be used only when you cannot find a time out area:

1. Take the child outside of the building and have him or her face the wall.
2. Take the child back to your car and have him or her sit on the floor of the back seat. Stay beside the child or in the front seat of the car.
3. Take along a small spiral notepad. Before entering the public place, tell the child that you will write down any episode of misbehavior and the child will then have to go to time out as soon as you get home for any misbehavior. You will find it helpful to take a picture of the child when he or she is in time out at home and keep this with your notepad. Show this picture to the child in front of the public place and explain that this is where he or she can expect to go when you return home for any misbehavior.
4. Take along a ballpoint or felt-tip pen. Tell the child in front of the public place that you will draw a hash mark on the back of the child's hand, one for each incident of misbehavior. The child will then serve a minimum sentence in time out at home for each hash mark on the hand.

Important reminder: Whenever you are out with your child, be sure to act quickly to deal with misbehavior so that it does not escalate into a loud confrontation with the child or a temper tantrum. Also, be sure to give frequent praise and rewards throughout the trip to reinforce your child's good behavior.