

# Making Shopping Fun



Shopping with young children can sometimes be challenging and stressful. But there are ways you can make the experience more enjoyable for both you and your child. Below are some ideas of how you can provide many opportunities for your child to interact, learn and have fun when you go shopping together.

## Before you go:

- **Prepare for the visit** – Help your child understand where you are going. You can use photos or pictures to make a schedule for your child, including a fun activity that will happen afterwards (e.g., first we will have lunch, next we will go shopping, then we will go to the park).
- **Think about the best time to go** – Avoid shopping during mealtimes and naptimes so your child doesn't feel overtired or hungry. Going shopping at quieter, non-peak times avoids crowds, noise and waiting in long queues. Some stores have a Quiet Hour which provides a low sensory shopping experience by making changes in store, such as reducing noise and distractions.
- **Make a shopping list** – Use cut-outs from catalogues, coupons, old packaging/labels, or draw pictures to make a shopping list with your child. This helps them know what you will buy at the store and set expectations.
- **Start with quick shopping trips** – If your child finds shopping difficult to manage, plan to buy a small number of items at first then very gradually increase the time you spend there.
- **Safety first** - Take a photo of your child on your phone just before you leave the house, so police and law enforcement can better identify your child if you separate. Teach your child to identify safe people they can go to for help, including police, firemen, security guards and store employees. You may also give your child an ID bracelet or wristband to wear with your name, number, and other important information (e.g., medical alerts).



## When you are shopping:

- **Bring calming items** – If your child gets overwhelmed by the sights, smells, and sounds of the shopping centre, bring something calming for your child that they can hold onto (e.g., a favourite toy, a snack, a drink, headphones to cancel out noise or listen to calming music/sounds)
- **Get your child involved** – Give your child appropriate choices of items they can choose from and ask your child to put items in the trolley or basket. This can help your child keep active and develop their independence. Try to use clear, simple, and specific instructions that your child can understand.
- Your child can hold on to the trolley or use their own small trolley or basket. If your child is sitting in the trolley seat, ensure they are seated at all times.
- **Follow your child's lead** - Observe and listen to what your child sees, smells, feels, and hears. Talk about it with your child to develop their understanding and vocabulary. For example, “You can see a carton of eggs on the shelf” or “It feels cold here in the freezer section!”



- You can also point out and read print, such as price tags or words/letters on packages.
- **Go on a Scavenger Hunt** – Ask your child to find items in the store of particular colour, size, shape, number, letter, or sign. For example, you can ask your child to find the aisle number or look for the green apples in the fruit section.
- Your child might take a book and match the colours or shapes from the book to items in the store.
- Let your child hold the shopping list and look for those items, so they can match the picture on the list to the real item. Your child can then cross out the items on the list once you put them in the cart.



## After shopping:

- **Let your child help you put the shopping away**  
– This is a good opportunity for your child to have the names of items repeated and learn where they go.
- **Pretend to play shopping at home** – Set up a pretend grocery store at home using simple materials such as empty boxes, shelves, packages, flyers, and coupons. This can help your child express what they have learnt from their shopping experience with you and to use their imagination.



## Further Resources:

Check out the links below for more information about how you can make the most out of shopping with your child:

- [www.coles.com.au/about-coles/community/accessibility/quiet-hour](http://www.coles.com.au/about-coles/community/accessibility/quiet-hour)
- [www.kmart.com.au/quietspace](http://www.kmart.com.au/quietspace)
- [www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/-A--is-for-Apple--What-Kids-Can-Learn-at-the-Groce.aspx](http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/-A--is-for-Apple--What-Kids-Can-Learn-at-the-Groce.aspx)
- [raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/shopping-with-children](http://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/shopping-with-children)

Ask your Start Strong Pathways Educator to help with ideas for this routine. They can help with making visuals and making a plan.

Does your child have an Occupational Therapist? Let them know you are working on making going shopping a more engaging time with your child. Check in with them about some calming strategies for your child or for other resources.

Does your child have a Speech Pathologist? They can help you with visuals as well as other resources to engage your child during shopping trips.

