

Helping My Sensory Needs

Everyday situations: Shopping



- Shopping with children can be very challenging for adults.
- Shopping environments can be very challenging for children, especially those with additional needs.
- Parents can prepare children, make changes to HOW they do the shopping, and WHERE, to help everyone have a successful time.
- Shopping is also an essential life skill that can help children develop independence in social skills, money management, healthy eating and cooking. Visiting the shops can be a valuable learning opportunity.

Consider the sensory experience for your child: unpredictable noises from music and people, other children crying, loud speaker announcements, trolley wheels. Bright lights, sometimes flickering. Changing temperatures within the cold section. So many items to look at. The movement of walking fast then stopping, bending and reaching, carrying.



Make changes to HOW you shop:

- **Where:** do you choose a big store, or a smaller store. One nearby a quiet park that you could go to afterwards?
- **When:** lots of shops have Autism friendly times of the week, where the music is turned off. Ask at your local shops if they do this, and if they don't, consider advocating for them to start. Try a less busy time of the week, such as earlier mornings. Consider what time of day your child is most likely to be happy and calm.
- **Who:** comes with you, could you ask a friend or relative to come with you to help?
- **How:** could you consider a grocery delivery during school holidays when you expect the shops will be more busy?

Before visiting the shops:

Visual schedule, create a set of pictures to represent each step. For example: bus, shops, park, bus, home. You can use photos, drawings or pictures, it can be on your phone or in a printed copy.

Watch a video, look at pictures, talk about the plan. Write the shopping list together, and talk about what you need. Look at grocery magazines or websites to find the items.

Objects of Reference: You can use a toy or item to represent the activity, to help them understand what is coming next. Use it each time to prepare your child, if words and books (social stories) are not engaging for them.

Watch this video to see how:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vetUsvdJX1A>

Help: Have a signal with your child for them to communicate if they need a break. This could be a sign, a gesture, or a picture you have printed for them to point to.

Break:

Think about where you could go to take a break, or how. Could you have a light scarf with you for them to drape over their head to 'escape' for a minute.

Remember to stop moving the trolley if they are in it, while they have a break, to give their sensory system a rest.



Take it One Step at a Time:

If your child is having trouble visiting new places, you could try helping them become familiar with the environment in short positive steps. For example, one week visit for only 5-10 minutes, the next week go to use the toilets or see the play area, and when they seem comfortable, then go into the grocery store.

During the Shopping:

- Would your child be able to carry a basket to collect items? Often having something slightly heavy to hold can help stay focused on the main task.
- Consider involving them in the shopping in a helpful way, could they choose the next item from the list to find? If you bring them to the fruit section, can they help you find the apples?
- Consider teaching them how to ask a shop attendant for help to find something.
- Each time you go to the shops with them, try to shop in the same order so they can learn the pattern.



1) Short visit to explore the place, toilets, play area

2) Short visit to only buy 1 or 2 items.

3) Longer shopping visit.

Sensory Tools:

Using a sensory tool can help them feel calm if the environment is overwhelming.

Bright Lights: Try sunglasses, a scarf, to have a few minutes in a darker lower lighting space.

Loud noises: Try ear defenders (<https://www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk/products/1-pack-childrens-ear-defenders>) or music in headphones

People bumping into them: Try them sitting in a trolley, or wearing long sleeves so they don't feel the bumps as much.

After the Shopping:

If your child is able, having them help carry grocery items can be very good physical activity for them.



Learning how to sort the groceries at home and put things in the correct location can be a great attention and memory task.

Resources:

Going to the shops Social Story: https://kidmunicate.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Social_Stories_Going_To_Grocery_Store.pdf

Going Shopping Video Social Story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdowSxss1J4>

Visiting the Store Social Story: http://weraspies.weebly.com/uploads/6/8/5/9/6859492/shopping_at_the_grocery_store.pdf

Using a Shopping List Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi7JB4Cm-64>