

## TIP SHEET Making Outings Less Stressful

For some children, going on outings and running errands can be stressful. They may be going to an unfamiliar place. There can be lots of noise and unfamiliar people. It's important to make children feel like they have some choices in the day's schedule and to reward them for good behavior. The following tips can help make outings less stressful for both children and parents.

1. **Set expectations-** Be sure to let children know what to expect. State clearly, "We are going to the doctor. We will wait in the office and then Dr. Klein will see you. I will be with you if you are afraid." If you are doing more than one thing, let the child know, "We are going to the store, the post office, and then the park." You can use the words "First" and "Then" and a choice board. Free visuals are downloadable at [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com).
2. **Provide support for the child to be successful-** Some children benefit from having information in writing or picture form. Reading stories that discuss what is going to happen can ease anxiety. Images allow children to see what is expected of them.
3. **Involve children in planning -** Children are often told what to do and have little ownership in decisions. Letting children make a few choices during an outing helps them feel they are a part of the process. For example, let the child pick which errand the family does first. Most children do best when presented with two choices. More than two choices can be overwhelming.
4. **Offer specific praise for a job well done-** As you go through the day, be sure to reinforce children for listening, following directions, and being kind to others. This shows children they get more attention for following the rules than for breaking them. Be specific when you offer praise so that the child knows exactly what was a good job.
5. **Provide updates regarding schedule changes-** Schedule changes happen regularly, and when they do, let children know what the change is and how it will affect their plans. For example, "The library is not open. We will still go to Aunt Jen's, and we will go to the library tomorrow." If you use visuals, keep an extra set in the car for unplanned changes.
6. **Plan for delays-** Prepare for basic concerns such as hunger and boredom by packing snacks and activities. Make sure to have a back up plan if restaurants or stores are busy. Avoid running errands or other activities when your child is tired.
7. **Get children involved-** Children are less likely to act out if they are busy. When you are shopping, have your child help locate groceries. If you are in the doctor's office, have the child help you fill out the forms by eliciting their responses to simple questions.
8. **Be consistent-** If a promise is made for the child to get something after going to the store, follow through and be consistent. When children are given mixed messages about rewards, the inconsistency can lead them to expect rewards when they have not met their end of the deal. Children will learn you mean what you say if you hold your ground.

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