



Helping Your Child Go Public with Good Behavior



When it comes to teaching appropriate public behavior, there is no better opportunity than when you and your young child are actually out in public.

Unfortunately, many parents avoid going out with their children simply because their behaviors away from home are so embarrassing, challenging or disruptive. This limits the opportunities young children have to learn appropriate social behavior.

So instead of avoiding social situations, we encourage you to seek them out. But do it on your terms and in short time spans. By controlling where and when you go out and for how long, you can maintain control and let your child improve at his or her own pace.



Here are some tips...

- **Practice**
Before venturing out, practice the skills and behaviors you want to see your child use in public. At home, you can “play” going to the store, library or restaurant with your child. Praise him or her for following the rules and for good “listening.” Once your child has mastered this “game” at home, move to a location close to home, keep the stay brief and reward positive behaviors. By staying close to home, you can return quickly if things do not go well.
- **Set Your Child Up for Success**
One way to do this is to make sure the environment is right. A formal restaurant, a

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lengthy religious service or a wedding are NOT the best environments in which to teach skills and have your child practice them. Expecting “good” behavior in those settings is a recipe for problems. Better settings for success might include the park, the mall or the grocery store.

- **Plan Ahead**

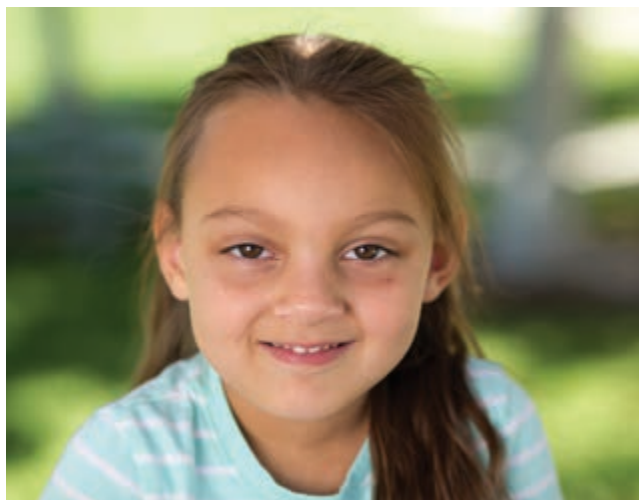
Make sure your child is fed, has used the bathroom and has items he or she can turn to for entertainment. Expecting a young child to sit quietly and wait patiently with nothing to do is not reasonable. Think about it: How patiently do YOU wait in traffic or at a doctor’s appointment?

- **Go Small**

Start with brief trips to stores, restaurants and so forth. Have your child stay by your side, wait or sit quietly for brief periods of time. Convenience stores and fast food restaurants are excellent places to practice these skills. Once your child has learned to follow a few basic rules in those locations, you can lengthen the trip or extend your time out in public.

- **Be Patient**

Your child is naturally going to be excited about being in new places, and learning to behave in new ways will take time. Slowly shape the behavior you want to see in your child through praise and firm correction, and remember that Rome wasn’t built in a day.



Additional Resources

- ***Help! There’s a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake for Meltdowns: How to Handle the Most Exasperating Behavior of Your 2- to 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O’Neal

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

