

Making Life Easier

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Running Errands

Running errands (e.g., going to the store, bank, etc.) is one of those essential household routines that all families experience. It is often thought of as a “maintenance” activity that is necessary for the family, but not enjoyable for young children. However, there can be huge benefits in taking your young child along. He learns about his community while spending time with someone he loves and trusts, someone who can help him understand the world beyond home and family. Running errands together offers the chance to build self-confidence, curiosity, social skills, self control, communication skills, and sensory exploration. He’ll have opportunities to greet and interact with other children and adults with your guidance and support. He will also be able experience the myriad of smells, tastes, sounds, and textures of the greater world within which he lives.

However, running errands can be extremely difficult if the child has challenging behavior. It’s not uncommon for families to feel overwhelmed by their child’s challenging behavior and resort to only running errands when someone else can care for the child at home. Sometimes, depending on the errand (e.g., a long shopping trip, parent visit to the doctor), that might be the best strategy. Still, there are steps you can take to help you and your child get the most out of these outings.

Tip: Plan for the transition from home to going out.

Let your child know where you both will be going. This can be done verbally, visually (timer, gesture, using sign language) and/or with sound (timer, count-down). Remember to allow time for the transition. Young children need time to shift their focus from one activity to another.

★ **Provide a transition warning.** It is a given that if you have a young child, he is going to have some trouble with transitioning from one activity/place to another.

- You might try giving him a verbal warning and say, “Nashon, we have to go to the store in 5 minutes. When you are done with your puzzle, we can put your shoes on.”

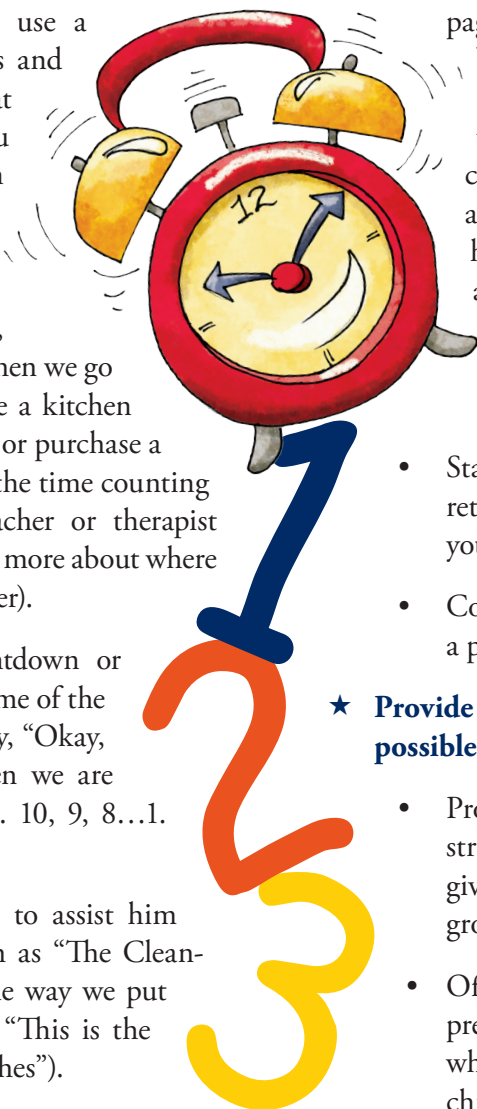


- Another strategy is to use a timer set for 5 minutes and let your child know that when the bell rings you are both going to get in the car to run a few errands. Remind him as the time gets closer. You might say, “Look, Barry, 2 more minutes then we go to the car.” You can use a kitchen timer to help your child or purchase a visual timer that shows the time counting down (your child’s teacher or therapist would be able to tell you more about where to purchase a visual timer).

- You might use a countdown or count up and make a game of the transition. You might say, “Okay, I am counting and then we are going to the post office. 10, 9, 8...1. Ready to go.”
- You might sing a song to assist him with the transition such as “The Clean-up Song” or “This is the way we put on our socks” (tune of “This is the Way We Wash our Clothes”).

★ Tell your child where you will be going.

- “First..., then...”: You can do this verbally, such as, “Mikey, we are going to run two errands and then we’ll be right back to watch a video. First, we are going to the bank. Then we are going to the post office. Then we’ll come home and watch your Barney video.”
- Some children need a more concrete and visual support of where they are going with you. Many parents have found great success with a travel book. This can be made with a small photo book with blank photo sleeves. To make a travel book, take photos of the places in your community that you frequent such as the bank, health food store, grocery store, post office, grandma’s house, the library, the park, etc. Place each picture in a photo page. As you prepare to run your errands, place the photos of the places you will go in sequential order (with home being the final



page) for your child. Describe where you will be going using the photos. For example, you might say “First, we are going to the bank, then to Grandma’s, etc., then home.” You can also use clip-art found on the internet or a picture from a magazine. Always end with home or a preferred destination (e.g., the park, a friend’s home). This strategy of planning for a naturally occurring reinforcer as part of your routine works better than bribing your child with an unrelated reward.

- Start with going to just one place and then returning home or to another favorite place of your child’s (e.g., McDonald’s, the park, etc.).
- Consider planning your trips so that they include a place that your child would like to go.

★ Provide choices for a transition object whenever possible.

- Providing choices for your child is a powerful strategy in preventing challenging behavior. This gives him a feeling of control and supports his growing confidence and sense of competency.
- Offering limited choices (2 or 3) versus many prevents your child from engaging in a game where you keep offering different things and your child keeps saying “not that one.” You might say, “Michaela, do you want bunny or baby doll to ride in the car with us?”

★ Prepare a cooler with a snack, a drink and an ice pack.

- Keep the travel cooler in your kitchen so that it is visible and readily accessible. When filling the cooler, allow your child to decide what snack/drink will go in it. Not only does your child get to make choices, he has the opportunity to help and is more motivated to run the errands with you.

★ Prepare your diaper bag.

- It is frustrating for you and your child not to have that needed item when you get somewhere. Keep a list of things that you need in your diaper bag or backpack (some families find that a backpack is easier to manage and allows you to have two hands free to guide your child). If possible, laminate the list. It’ll be more durable that way.

As you prepare to leave, read over your list to make sure that you have everything you need before heading out the door. If possible, enlist the help of your child in getting anything that you might need for the bag. If your child needs special supports such as a nebulizer or communication board, those items should be on your list. Additionally, it will help other adults and older children make sure that everything is in the bag.

Tip: Turn getting in the car seat into a game.

Keep in mind that young children love being playful about everything and that from 18 months on up they are interested in doing things independently.

- ★ **Make getting to the car a game.** (e.g., hop, skip, and follow the leader). Give him a choice of the manner for moving to the car. You might say, “Let’s skip to the car” or “Do want to hop or skip?” Or you can make it a race. You might say, “Can you get to the car by the time I count to 5?” (Just be sure to count slowly.)



★ Buckling up the car seat:

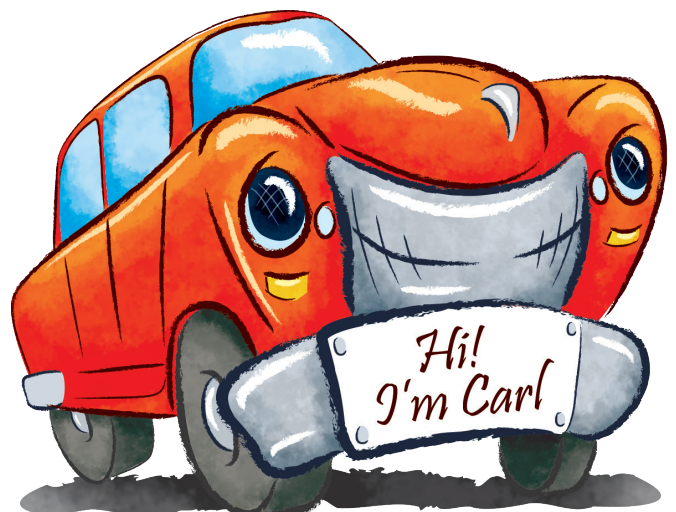
- Make up a song about buckling up. You might sing, “This is the way we buckle up...” (to the tune of “This is the way we wash our clothes”).
- Show him a picture of himself safely buckled in his seat. Keep it in his travel book.
- Encourage your child to help with “buckling up” as much as he is able. He could pull the strap over his shoulders and then it is Mommy’s turn to do the rest. You might say, “Shayna’s turn. Please, help me with the straps. Mommy’s turn. Snap. Snap. All done.”
- State the rule that the car cannot go until everybody has their seatbelts on.

Tip: Make your car a child-friendly place.

If your child is busy in the car, both you and he will have a happier experience.

- ★ **Many parents have found it successful to have an activity bin in the car.** Fill the activity bin with a few of your child’s favorite things. Some examples might be a couple of books, markers and drawing paper, figurines, or a sticker book. You can create a bin by using any box or plastic, lidded container. Keep the bin in the car, but change the contents every week. By changing the toys, the bin is always interesting and fun for your child. Another option is to use a backseat organizer. These hang from the front seat headrest and contain compartments for storing toys, CDs, drinks/snacks, or the travel book. Some have mirrors to entertain younger children.

- ★ **Children’s music CDs:** There are many music CDs that have music and lyrics that both you and your child will enjoy. You’ll find some with songs from your child’s favorite television shows and movies. There are also music CDs that have songs with a school readiness focus that offer your child a fun way to learn how to count, say the letters, or learn how to rhyme, etc. Some CDs include songs about riding in the car (Sesame Street/Bert & Ernie, Going Riding in the Car) or everyday routines such as dressing, brushing teeth, etc. You and your child will have the opportunity to sing, laugh and learn together. This is a great way to make your ride to places enjoyable for you and your child.



Tip: Provide your child choices.

Use choices to prevent challenging behavior. When you offer your child a choice, you provide him with the opportunity to have control and be independent.

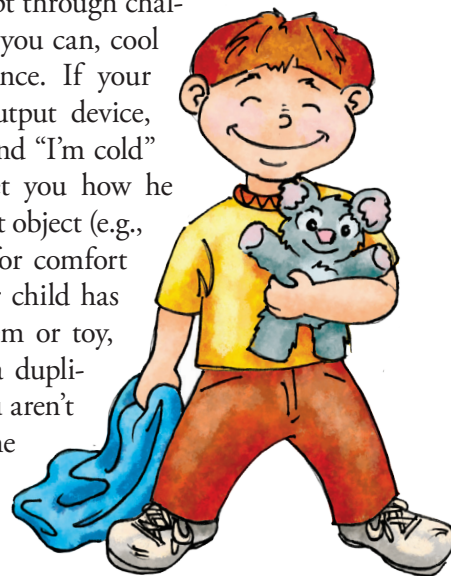


- ★ **If your child has limited communication skills, provide him with a choice board.** These are pictured choices from which he can tell you what he wants. They could be photos or clip art. You might have a page in his travel book of song choices, CD choices, or snack/drink choices, etc. Each picture can be velcroed onto a page in his travel book and he can point to the picture or give it to you to indicate his choice. For children who have vision impairments or blindness, you can offer a choice by handing your child two objects or pieces of objects and asking the child to make a selection.
- ★ **Let your child choose the music to be played.** You might like country music but it might not be his choice. Listen to it another time when you are in the car alone. A pleasant ride running errands will make listening to the Wiggles or a Raffi CD one more time well worth the effort. You might even enjoy singing with your child. Most children love this activity.
- ★ **Some families have DVD players and hand-held game systems for the car.** These are passive activities that don't promote learning or building a relationship with your child. You might want to save these for those

longer trips. Running errands are a great opportunity to interact with your child, create a pleasurable routine, and help your child learn.

Tip: Keep your child comfortable.

Make sure that your child is not too hot or cold. If he has limited language, he may not be able to tell you that he is uncomfortable (except through challenging behavior). If you can, cool the car off in advance. If your child has a voice output device, program "I'm hot" and "I'm cold" into it so he can let you how he feels. Have a comfort object (e.g., blankie) in the car for comfort and warmth. If your child has a special comfort item or toy, it will pay to keep a duplicate in the car so you aren't looking for it at the last minute as you are trying to leave the house.



These simple prevention tips can make getting in the car or on the bus to run errands much easier for your child. Once out of the house, you and your child can take care of these household tasks and have fun during your time together.

In closing, please remember that the team of professionals that support you and your child will have additional specific ideas about how to help your child. Don't forget to ask them! Your child's speech therapist, physical therapist, teacher, or other professional should be able to help you think about the best way to support your child within daily routines and community activities. If your child is having persistent challenging behavior within this activity, you should ask the professionals who work with you to help develop a behavior support plan that will provide more specific strategies to prevent challenging behavior and help your child develop new social and communication skills.

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children

www.challengingbehavior.org



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Making Life Easier: Running Errands

- ★ Use a **transition warning** (e.g., verbal, timer, count down, sing a song).
- ★ **Tell** your child where you will be going.
 - Use “First..., Then...” statements.
 - Use a Travel Book.
 - Include one of your child’s favorite places.
 - Provide a transition object (toy, blankie, book, travel book, etc.).
 - Provide 2 or 3 choices for the transition object.
- ★ Prepare a **cooler**.
- ★ Prepare your **diaper bag** or a backpack (written list in bag).
- ★ Getting in the **Car Seat**:
 - Make getting to the car a game (sing, skip, hop, race, count to 10).
 - Make buckling up in his car a game (sing, encourage child’s your child’s help).
 - Show a picture of him safely buckled in his seat. Keep it in his travel book.
 - Insist that everybody has their seatbelts on before the car moves.
- ★ Provide your child **choices**.
 - Your child could choose music, toys, books, etc.
- ★ Make **your car** a “child friendly” place.
 - Keep an activity bin in the car. Rotate the contents every now and then. Allow your child to choose some of the contents.
 - Play children’s music CDs. Provide 2 or 3 choices. Sing together.
 - Cool or heat car in advance. Provide a means for your child to communicate how he feels.