



Making a Plan

One of the best ways to deal with behaviour problems is to prevent them before they even happen. If you already know what places or times might be especially challenging, it's a good idea to make a plan beforehand so that your child has a chance to do his or her best. Here are the steps:

1. Get ready

If you know ahead of time that a difficult situation is coming up, try to do whatever you can to be ready. Ask yourself the following:

Will my child have something interesting to do? It often helps to give your child something to do so that he or she does not get bored, because boredom can often lead to trouble. For example, bringing a bag of toys or a few books on a long car ride or shopping trip can help keep your child engaged. Another idea is to give your child a job to do, such as help you check items off of a grocery list – thus giving you the opportunity to interact with your child and provide lots of praise.

Will my child be too tired? If your child has a harder time when tired, part of the plan should be to allow for enough sleep the night before or even a nap during the day. Otherwise, an event may be moved to a better time. For example, a routinely challenging visit to the doctor's office or a neighbour's house might work better in the morning instead of in the late afternoon.

Will my child be hungry? If you know your child is more difficult when he or she is hungry, plan to bring snacks with you or try scheduling activities right after a meal instead of before. For example, going grocery shopping when your child is hungry might make him or her more likely to demand junk food, and could also make him or her less able to focus on your instructions and requests.



Are there objects or people I can remove? Sometimes you will know of certain things that make situations worse. For example, toys that lead your child to play roughly may need to be put away. Perhaps there is too much noise in the house for the child to hear your instructions. A sibling who does not want to share may cause a fight. Ask yourself what should and should not be in the situation, and who should and should not be there. For especially challenging situations, you should try to set the stage for success as much as you can.

2. Set Rules

If you know ahead of time what is likely to go wrong, make up to three rules for your child to follow. These should be rules that are often violated by your child in that particular place or situation. After you have told your child the rules, ask your child to repeat them back to you. You should avoid starting the event or situation if your child cannot repeat the rules to you.

3. Set up a Reward

Before you go into the challenging situation, tell your child what he or she can earn for following the rules you have just made. For example, you might bring stickers for your young child who accompanies you on errands. Or you could prompt your child that if he or she can play nicely instead of being aggressive on the playground, he or she can stay an extra 15 minutes or have a treat when you get home.

4. Set up Consequences


Before you go into the challenging situation, tell your child what the consequences will be for not following rules or for misbehaviour. This should normally be the active ignoring. It may sometimes be the loss of privileges for minor rule violations and a removal from the situation for more severe misbehaviour. Do not be afraid to remove your child from a situation in a public place, as it is the most effective method for teaching the child to follow rules in such places.

5. Practise if You Can

Some situations are possible to practise beforehand, and if so, it's a good idea to try a "practice run." Situations like going to the dentist or doctor, getting dropped off at school, getting on the bus and quickly finding a seat, coming home and putting away a coat and backpack are all situations that can be easily practised ahead of time. Walk through some of the steps, and be sure to provide plenty of praise for a good performance.




Getting Started




Pick a situation that is challenging for your child that occurs regularly (like shopping trips, visits to neighbours, school drop-off, or long drives).

My child has extra trouble when:




What are some things you could do to be ready for that situation next time?

Before we try that again, I will make sure that:



What rules does your child need to follow for that situation?


I expect my child to:



What are the rewards and consequences connected to those rules?

If my child obeys the rules:

If my child does not follow the rules:



Will you be able to practise this situation? If so, pick a time when you can practise it together.

Here is when I plan to practise this situation: