

FUSSBUSTERS

on the go



STRATEGIES AND GAMES
FOR STRESS-FREE OUTINGS,
ERRANDS, AND VACATIONS
WITH YOUR PRESCHOOLER

CAROL BAICKER-McKEE, Ph.D.

FUSSBUSTERS

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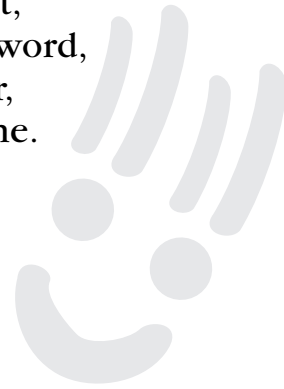


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CAROL BAICKER-McKEE, Ph.D.


PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

Dedicated
to my father,
Mike McKee,
who gave me his wanderlust,
his appreciation of the written word,
and his silly sense of humor,
but fortunately not his hairline.
I love you.



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Acknowledgments

I've noticed that the closer I get to a deadline, the more things in my life break or go wrong. (I'm sure this is some corollary to Murphy's Law.) And if you miss a deadline and get close to the new one, even bigger and more essential things start breaking. And what happens if you miss that deadline and have to set a third one? Let's just say it involves major appliances and X rays.

That's why for this book, I not only have to thank all those people I thanked the last time, like my husband Steve and kids, Eric, Sara, and Kyle. (See—I did the names out of order so that Kyle doesn't always go first. You're absolutely right that that's not fair.) I also have to thank all the people who kept fixing things or stepping in to hold things together for me so my family didn't come completely unraveled while I finished it.

So, thanks to the refrigerator repairman, the furnace guy, the plumber, and Ken the kitchen guy. And Dr. Scott Tyson and the other staff at Pediatrics South. And thanks to the Robbs who have chauffeured Eric to more than their share of camping trips and other scouting events, and to the Magalotti family (Roni, Mark, Paul, and Daniel) for filling in for me yesterday when I actually *forgot* to pick up the boys from Academic Games practice. My gratitude to Mary Lou Vanzin and family who always give me reminders of important forms and upcoming activity deadlines, as well as general moral support and bucking up. Thanks, too, to Brenda Nascone

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Introduction

About the Author

OR, HOW I CAME TO WRITE ANOTHER BOOK THAT MENTIONS
BODILY FUNCTIONS ON NEARLY EVERY PAGE

The “About the Author” part of this book will answer the following questions:

1. I do not care to have lunch with this Carol Baicker-McKee lady, but what made her want to write this crazy book?
2. What makes her think *she's* qualified to write a book on going places with your kids and trying to keep them from being totally crabby?
3. Why the heck does she have to mention barf, pee, poop, boogers, and diarrhea on nearly every page?

I'll try to respond to the questions in the order they've been asked.

(Legal Disclaimer: Notice I did *not* say I would really answer them.)

Answer to Question Number One This is an actual question that was submitted by a sharp student at a school where I did an author visit a couple years ago. It is one of the best questions I have ever been asked at a school visit, and I have the original piece of notebook paper framed and

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hanging in my office. The question was actually about a totally different book, but I think the question applies equally well to this one, so I'll answer it anyway.

I'm a mom, and I wanted to write this book so I would get out of doing the laundry for a while. It has sort of worked. I have not done any laundry in weeks. Unfortunately, neither has anyone else, not even the dog, and so we are all wearing dirty underwear except for the dog, who prefers to go au naturel. As for lunch, it's probably good that you don't want to have it with me. I have not been grocery shopping in quite some time either, and if you were to have lunch with me, you'd have to settle for licking some peanut butter off the knife since there's not really enough left to bother spreading it on a piece of bread. I'd advise you to ignore the dog's begging, while you're licking. You don't have to feel guilty and share with her, because there is plenty of her low-cal dog food left (I wisely bought the super-size bag last time.)—at least that's what I keep trying to tell myself when she stares at me with those big sad eyes.

Answer to Question Number Two If you look through my parents' family albums (*Author's aside: These are not, on the whole, actual albums, but rather shoe boxes and stacks of slides—I came by my own photo-shoebox storage "system" honestly.*), you will quickly understand why I am uniquely qualified to write a book about going places with crabby kids. There I am at three at the White House Easter Egg Roll, arms crossed and glaring. At seven or so, standing on a beach someplace looking utterly sad and miserable. And again at age nine at the Montreal Expo, huddled in my coat and scowling at the camera. Oh, and there at eleven, looking daggers at my sister next to a rickety bus in Banff, Canada. Probably there were few kids of my generation who were taken to as many places as I was while being as fussy, grumpy, crabby, irritable, and generally out of sorts as I was. And my parents never once *really* stopped the car and made me walk home. There were also many moments—documented in the family photo stacks as well—when I was pleasant, cheerful, cooperative, and a delight to be with, thanks in large part to my parents' expert management of me and

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their three other kids. Thus, I got to experience firsthand how to change lousy moods into reasonable ones while out and about.

I also have been on the parent side of the equation, which has given me opportunities to put my many theories to the test and see which ones work and which ones falter. I have been to the grocery store with kids in tow at least, oh, let's just say an infinite number of times, which means I've had a chance to find ways to make the whole experience less whiny. I've logged enough minivan kid hours to qualify me for a chauffeur's license. And with one child who was prone to ear infections (code for at the pediatrician's at least once a week) and two other kids with their share of strep throats, sinus infections, and big boo-boos, I learned ways to comfort kids in unpleasant circumstances. Finally, I've been brave enough to travel with my kids as far as Paris, France, and that says something, if you know what I mean.

I also have lots of those kinds of qualifications that look good on the back of the dust jacket, but aren't necessarily as useful for the actual writing of the book as they might seem. I'm a former teacher, from daycare and preschool classes to after school programs and community college. (In fact, the teaching qualification is helpful, particularly in the field trip expertise department.) I have a B.A. in psychology from Yale University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical child psychology from the University of Virginia. I've worked as a child and family therapist in various outpatient and hospital settings, where I was privileged to learn from some very child-savvy folks as well as from some kids who taught me a lot about observing, being flexible, and the power of kindness in the face of strong emotions.

Does that answer your question?

Answer to Question Number Three Because I have spent so much time with young kids, I think they're good for a laugh. Plus, they are For Real Major Important Issues with young children; ignore them at your peril. And very few books on parenting or going places with young kids

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discuss barf, boogers, etc., in sufficient detail so that you really learn what to do about them.

About This Book

FussBusters on the Go is a sort of a twin to another book called *FussBusters at Home*. You can certainly read one and not the other, just as you can invite one twin to your child's birthday party and not the other, but it might hurt the feelings of the one who is left out. And besides, they look kind of cute standing there together in their matching covers on your shelf.

During my therapy years I snagged one of my favorite quotes from a greeting card or something and pasted it on the wall of my office. It is attributed to Hodding Carter, who was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and who probably said lots of other poetic, slightly sappy, yet absolutely true things. Here's the quote:

There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.

Isn't that nice? Put it up on your wall or refrigerator too. In my mind, *FussBusters at Home* is sort of the *roots* book, since it's about helping your child have a settled, reasonably happy home life. This book, on the other hand, is the *wings* book, the one that looks at ways to help you start launching your child into the wider world. (Naturally when your child is this age, you'll be holding his hand and making sure he's buckled in safely, but it's still the beginning of his leaving the security of his nest.) Which is why you have a whole new crop of fusses to contend with.

I've divided the book into two main sections. The first five chapters are devoted to those short forays into the world around your town or community. The last four chapters address problems that arise as you venture farther afield on trips and vacations. Within chapters I have tried to group activities into subcategories where it seemed appropriate, such as

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ideas for car rides or strategies for trips on public transportation. And, as in the first book, I have tried to focus on suggestions that don't require an advanced degree in early childhood education or Styrofoam trays.

Each chapter opens with a short introduction that highlights the content of the chapter, and sometimes relates real-life anecdotes designed to help you feel like you're at least a better parent than I am. The individual activities or tips are described in easy-to-follow directions, and I've occasionally included safety tips or references to other helpful resources like books or websites.

Preschooler Principles

The following are some characteristics of young children that have guided the development and selection of the activities in both *FussBusters* books. Understanding these principles may help you interpret your child's responses and guide you in choosing activities to suit your child's needs. Plus, this section gives me a chance to use that expensive education I spent years pursuing.

- ***Preschoolers like consistency, rituals, predictability.*** Life is full of surprises for young children. Anything that makes the world more predictable or that lets them know what to expect makes them feel safer and braver. Repetition helps them master new skills, ideas, and language. Finally, routines help them develop responsibility—they learn *what* they should do *when*. “Do it again” is the credo of the young child. That's why they want to have peanut butter and banana sandwiches on white bread with the crusts removed and cut into perfect triangles for lunch. Every day. For the next four years.
- ***As inconsistent as it seems, preschoolers like novelty and variety.*** They like novelty and variety—within a framework of predictability. Serve that perfect peanut butter and banana sandwich on a doll's plate inside a cardboard box,

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and you'll be a hero! On other occasions, your support and encouragement will help your child to welcome the new and accept changes.

Young children also have short attention spans and may need more frequent shifts of activities, with a balance of quiet and active things to do. That's why they alternate between teasing their little sister in whispers and tackling her with Tarzan yells.

- ***Preschoolers need to move their bodies.*** Young children are developing their muscles and the neurological connections that control them. They need space and permission to be active and use their large muscles. They'll use them in the dining room on the chandelier if you don't send them outside. And don't forget opportunities to use the small muscles in their hands and eyes as they do art projects, manipulate small toys, look at books, and disassemble the VCR.
- ***Preschoolers use all their senses.*** They learn with their whole selves. Sensory activities will capture their attention, and many, such as water play, have a wonderfully calming effect.

Preschoolers' drive to use their senses can still cause trouble, though. Even though their emerging self-control helps them to refrain from touching things they shouldn't or putting everything in their mouths, temptation may sometimes override their better sense, leading them try out your best makeup on the dog. Supervise and continue to childproof their play areas. Pay attention to the safety notes included with some *FussBusters* activities.

- ***Preschoolers' temperaments continue to shape their actions and reactions.*** Individual differences can be quite striking—and perfectly normal. Be flexible and respect your child's special needs, interests, and tastes. Even if they run

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more strongly in favor of slugs and superheroes than yours do.

- **Gender rules.** Gender identification is quite strong during this period. Young girls may reject seemingly neutral activities as “just for boys,” and boys may refuse to do anything they see as “girl stuff.” If you have a little girl, odds are good that she will spend hours enveloped in tulle waiting for Prince Charming, and if you have boys, expect to spend a great deal of time discussing the relative merits of various dinosaurs and arguing about whether he is allowed to pretend the hose nozzle is a ray gun that can annihilate his sister. These sexist attitudes will make you want to gag, but don’t get too worked up. By first grade, most will have faded dramatically, even if you skip the equal rights lectures.

Preschooler Management 101

Ever wonder why your child is more cooperative with his teacher or grandparents? The main reason is security—he feels comfortable enough with you to risk making mistakes or even misbehaving. You can’t (and wouldn’t want to) change that. But another reason may be that teachers and grandparents have acquired skills from long and repeated experience with young children. Adopting these attitudes and strategies can make your life with your child easier—and more fun.

Anticipate—Remember both senses of this word:

- **Be prepared.** Thinking ahead will help you avoid problems and set the stage for success. For example, buy clothes your child can fasten himself or place dishes where he can reach them easily. You can also help prepare your child, whose sense of the future, recall of the past, and awareness of time is just developing, for events on the horizon. As much as possible, tell him what to expect, warn him of upcoming

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transitions, and remind him of important rules, like “Don’t say ‘poo-poo butt’ to Great-uncle Walter.”

- **Look forward to.** It’s easy to get bogged down in the drudgery of everyday life with a preschool child. But changing your mindset to expect pleasure can improve both your mood and your child’s behavior. Take advantage of the opportunities young children offer you to slow down, to live in the here and now, to notice and marvel at all the small miracles in the world.

Communicate clearly.

Language is still a new skill for small children, so you have to make it easy for them to understand you. What works:

- Make sure you have their attention.
- Exaggerate your facial expressions, tone of voice, body language.
- Give only one or two directions at a time.
- Be specific.
- Don’t offer choices unless you mean them.
- Make sure you understand their messages.
- Give them the words they need.
- Use the word “poop” when you really need them to hear you.

Invoke imagination and humor.

Making believe is an important and emerging skill during the preschool years. *And* it’s probably the easiest route to securing your child’s cooperation. He might balk at dressing for church, but he’ll cheerfully don his Sunday-best space suit! A good dose of silliness helps too.

Reset your clock.

Preschoolers have short legs, and most of the time we remember to adjust our strides to match their slower pace. But we also need to remem-

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ber that *many* tasks take young children longer. Allowing enough time will reduce stress for everyone and boost your child's emerging competence.

Conversely, we sometimes need to speed things up, to adjust for children's shorter attention spans and smaller energy reserves. Two hours at the art museum is probably an hour and a half too long for most young children. Accept that, for a few years, you'll need to be flexible and accommodating.

Refocus and reframe.

Distraction, so effective with toddlers, is also a useful tool with preschoolers. Finding an element of challenge may be the best way to keep a child this age from noticing how much he dislikes something. For example, "I'll bet I can scrub my hands longer than you can!" can produce some impressively clean hands for both of you.

Just as reframing an old picture can bring out its beauty, so can describing an event differently change its impact. If your child was scared by a thunderstorm, you may be able to influence her perception of the experience by helping her notice how well she coped by closing her eyes and covering her ears.

Put yourself in your child's shoes.

Stooping down to your child's size, sometimes literally, will help you make sense of his behavior and remind you of ways to structure his environment so he can succeed. It's good to remind yourself that he may not be able to see what's on the countertop, reach the rack to rehang his towel, or carry that heavy plate.

Take Care:

- ***Of your child*** Your child may loudly assert her competence and independence, but the next minute she may beg for you to help take off her socks. You should expect her to need you

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especially when she is tired, ill, or stressed by new experiences or problems with her friends or at home. And, no matter how capable she seems, she will need frequent encouragement and reassurance, as well as regular physical contact and demonstrations of your love and affection.

- ***Of yourself*** On airlines, flight attendants instruct you to fit your own oxygen mask before you help your child—if you pass out, you'll be no use to your child, and she may not be able to help you. The same principle holds true in everyday life. So don't feel guilty about using activities just to give yourself a half-hour to read a magazine. And feel free to skip suggestions that you find unappealing.

CHAPTER ONE

Un-Erring Those Errands



Okay, let's see a show of hands. How many of you would rather have a root canal than go to the post office, the dry cleaners, and the supermarket with a couple of kids under the age of six? Well, me neither. Even though I have the nicest, gentlest dentist in the world, high-stakes dentistry has never been my cup of tea. Still, it's a closer call than it ought to be.

Running errands involves a whole slew of things that preschoolers hate: adult-oriented activities, transitions, temptations that must be resisted, and time away from their friends and action figures. This means that running errands requires you to have the patience of seven preschool teachers, the ingenuity of a four year old stalking the Kit Kat bars you've hidden on the top shelf of the hall closet, and the energy level of said four year old after he reaches the candy cache. Or at least the forbearance of fellow shoppers who'll look the other way when you turn into a ranting, raving maniac. It's also helpful to have a child who has not yet learned the phone number for Child Protective Services.

I can't give you the patience, especially since I tend to run a bit short of it myself when I'm shopping with the kids, nor can I tell you for sure





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how to find the energy. (Some people swear by herbal extracts like ginseng, but I've noticed that the Kit Kat bars will work at least short-term. Although with that approach, you're putting yourself at risk of spending time in the dentist's chair and *still* having to run errands with the kids.) I *can* give you a bit of the ingenuity, in the form of activities that will trick kids into thinking that they're having, if not a good time, at least not such a miserable one. And that can be a Very Good Thing. I'll tell you why momentarily.

This chapter contains a variety of activities for the various shopping experiences you're likely to encounter frequently if you're an urban or suburban parent. (I didn't really come up with great ideas for when you're hauling the garbage to the dump or picking up a dozen bales of hay—I don't have the expertise for those situations, so if you need some ideas for them, all I can say is good luck.) The chapter opens with ideas for stocking the supplies that will grease the wheels of your shopping cart-bound experience, then tosses in ideas for preventing or handling problems when you're dragging the gang through the supermarket or mall. The last few activities will help when you encounter major difficulties, like kids doing the pee dance in the checkout line or visits to the (shudder) toy store.

Now, back to why it's good to distract the kids and keep them in good humor. You might have a kid like I was—one who turns into a temperamental terror when stressed by too much shopping. One day when I was about four or five, my mom stopped to drop something off at someone's house after we'd spent a long afternoon of running one errand after another. She left me waiting in the car, and then got to chitchatting with her friend while I fumed. Several minutes later, when she showed no signs of coming back to whisk me home, I locked all the car doors. And when my mom returned and tried to use the key to open the doors, I just kept locking them as fast as she could unlock them. I don't remember how our standoff ended (probably my memory loss is due to posttraumatic stress disorder), but I do know that after that day, my mom respected my Errand Quota and was careful not to exceed it. And you should keep that in mind,

Un-Erring Those Errands

too, even with these ideas to help you stretch your kid's shopping tolerance. Or pretty soon you might find yourself preferring the root canal.

Make Like a Boy Scout AND VENTURE OUT PREPARED

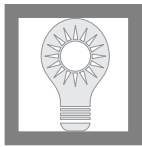
When you have a baby, it's a bad idea to leave the house without a spare diaper. And with a preschooler, it's almost as bad an idea to leave the house without a backup action figure or two for emergencies. The good thing about preschoolers is that you won't *have* to have as much junk as you absolutely must have with the tiny guys, but errands and outings will still go much more smoothly if you're prepared for the usual contingencies, from queasy stomachs to teasing siblings.

The Well-Stocked Car In addition to all the usual supplies you probably keep in your car (like change, your sunglasses, and a cell phone) if you are lugging kids with you, you'll be prepared for most everyday kid "emergencies" if you have the following:

- First aid kit, with *lots* of adhesive bandages, Dramamine (if car sickness is a problem), children's acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Chemical hand warmers/ice bags (good for bigger boo-boos)
- Blanket and towels (many uses)
- Plastic bags (for garbage or finds)
- Tissues, paper towels, napkins
- Hand wipes and/or Purell-style hand-sanitizing lotion
- Stacking plastic containers, like those used for Cool Whip, or coffee cans, with lids (for food messes or as emergency barf/pee containers)
- Sunscreen, skin lotion (good for distraction, as well as for intended use)
- Gallon milk jug filled with water (replace frequently) and spray mister bottle (for wash-ups, stain treatment, cooling mist, cleaning boo-boos)

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- Change of clothing for all kids, including underwear
- Small toys, rotated periodically, inflatable ball
- Children's books and tapes, also rotated
- Small individually packaged snacks (I recommend lollipops and raisins, both of which keep well.) and drinks (Sports bottles are great, preferably filled with water, as well as shelf-stable chocolate milk found in packages similar to "juice boxes.")
- Paper, pen or pencil, clipboard, roll of tape, stickers
- Eye mask, small pillow



TRY THIS!

For kids who no longer put small things in their mouths, a great, easy car toy is a margarine tub with a slit in the lid and a bag of pennies. Most preschoolers will spend long periods plonking the pennies through the slit. You can also hand out pennies as tokens or rewards. Some kids use them to tally things they're counting like red cars, stop signs, etc.

You might also want to stock a laundry stain stick or spray, car shades, and individual tape player with earphones if you can't bear to listen to Raffi one more time. It's also a good idea to keep a laminated card in the glove compartment with emergency numbers, insurance information, allergies, etc. Remember to update it as needed.

The Well-Stocked Tote

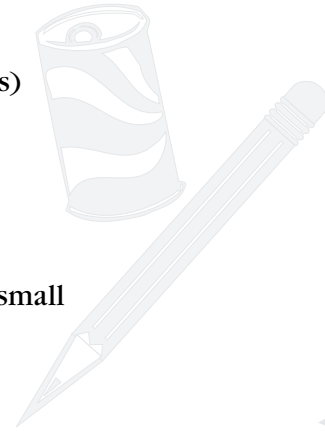
If your diaper bag days are over, you'll be able to get by lugging a lot less stuff. Yes, I know some of these items overlap with the car supplies, but you won't want to take the time to hunt down and transfer what you need to carry along. Here's the good news:

Most threes can carry their stuff themselves! A small backpack is best, but some prefer a pocketbook or briefcase (an old backgammon case works well). If you make a picture list of the necessary items, you can laminate

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it and attach it to the bag. Then your child can be in charge of making sure he has everything. Suggested supplies:

- Snack, including drink
- A few small toys (miniature cars, figures, animals) and/or book
- Small notebook and pen or pencil
- “Lookers”—magnifying glass, compact mirror, mini-binoculars
- Purell (available in tiny bottles) or hand wipes, small package of tissues
- Band-Aids
- Stickers or tape
- A couple of plastic bags, including a zipper-style one



Grocery Store Games

SHOP 'N' PLAY

Playing a few games each time you shop will make the experience more enjoyable for both you and your child. It may even speed things up, since your child will want to hurry along to the next “play station.” Here are a few of my kids’ favorite supermarket games:

Mine, Mine!

Choose some produce that you are buying in quantity, like peaches. Show your child that there are small differences between the items. Like snowflakes and children, no two peaches are exactly alike. Have your child choose a “favorite” that she would like to eat later. Examine it carefully for blemishes, color markings, shape variations, and so on that will enable her to recognize it. At home or in the checkout lane, see if she can find “hers.” Let her eat her one-of-a-kind treat once it’s paid for.

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Weighty Matters

My kids' eyes light up at the scales. We have estimating contests for items we're going to weigh, offering a small prize, like picking what kind of ice cream we buy, for the closest guess. Obviously, this game takes experience. Younger kids may be able to join in if you provide them with a range of choices. Or play a junior weight game: Let them hold two objects and decide which feels heavier. Use the scales to check their answer.

What's What?

Have your child close his eyes. Pull something off the shelf and let him examine it without looking. Help him notice shape, weight, temperature, scent, and any other characteristics that seem appropriate. Then have him guess what it might be. You can adjust the difficulty level of this game in many ways. For example, an easier game for a young child is to try to distinguish between two wildly different items, like a package of cheese versus a carton of yogurt.

A Doaf of Dread

Fetching is one of the best jobs for a preschooler in the store. Make it more interesting with silly language that he has to puzzle out. For example, change the first letter of each word like "a pox of peréal," use the same vowel sounds ("a boonch of boo-noo-noos"), or use pig latin, gibberish, or a different language. Once your child has figured out what he's supposed to find, you can direct him to the specific brand and size you want. Make sure it's something he can reach easily. And, keep in mind that preschoolers are not the most discriminating shoppers. You'll want to avoid having them choose things like the cut of meat you're serving at the dinner party for your boss. Okay, don't even let them choose the strawberries for your morning cereal, unless you don't mind bruised and moldy ones. I know, I know—how can the same preschooler who has a shrieking fit if you try to serve him a banana with a microscopic bruise be completely blind to massive rot when he's in the grocery store? I don't know—but he can be. So, *always* reserve veto power for his selections.

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Paper Towel Balancing Act

Be prepared for frowns from crabby sorts who don't approve of kids having fun, but this game is good for high energy kids. Paper towel rolls are a great material, because they won't break or hurt anything if dropped. You can play several ways, such as pitting a kid against a standard (e.g., balance it until I count to five, until you walk to the end of the aisle, etc.) or against another person (though this may prove too frustrating). Other items to balance include small packages of paper napkins (on his head) or boxes of plastic bags (on his outstretched arms). But don't let him try the carton of eggs, even if he swears he's a balance pro.

Checkout Challenges

Estimate the total for the groceries, giving younger kids the option of choices you specify. Kids are often amazed at how much groceries cost. Other fun guesses: how many bags will be needed, which two items will end up in the same bag, which line will win (hint: not the one I'm in), whether there will be a price check or other problem. Naturally, a quarter for the machines will be a coveted prize for the winner.

Shopping Stickum

STAY TOGETHER STRATEGIES

Keeping the kids within arm's reach or at least eyesight is one of the most aggravating parts of shopping. If you let them roam, you'll invariably spend a lot of time scolding and threatening. On the other hand, if you let them *push* the cart, they'll manage to ram it into a precarious display or a senior citizen. And getting them to ride in the cart is even worse. These strategies, while not nearly as good as a sitter, worked *much* of the time for me and cut way down on the squabbles.

A Cart of His Own

Some supermarkets actually provide pint-sized carts for young shoppers. Ours didn't, so we just brought our own. An umbrella stroller

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equipped with a bag in the seat (hook it over the handles) will do in a pinch. Your child will stick with his own shopping longer if you give him his own list. You can have him memorize a list of items as long as his age on the way to the store, tell him items to look for aisle by aisle, or make a picture list for him to use. Coupons can also act as a list, but you risk losing them. It's a good idea to make sure the items are distributed throughout the store and that at least some are things he likes. Obviously, avoid anything breakable, heavy, or that requires skill to select (like most produce).

Pet Carts

This is a bit goofy, and it slows you down on entry, but it works well with some kids. Buy a cheap, short nylon leash. When you get to the store, let your child select a cart to be her pet. Give it a name and discuss its characteristics. Then attach the leash to it and let your kid "walk" her pet through the store (while you push). We always got stuck buying cart biscuits (animal crackers) and cart food (usually junky cereal) to feed it, but somehow it felt better to have her begging for her pet instead of herself.

Scavenger Shopper

This is good for high-energy kids. At the start of each aisle, pick something they'll have to hunt for, but that they'll be able to recognize. (It doesn't have to be something you're buying.) I often chose something not right at eye level, so the hunt was a little more challenging. If they found the item by the time I reached that point, they won. Winning was reward enough. Speedy, experienced shopper-hunters can be given several items to locate before you finish the aisle, like rice, chicken noodle soup, and SpaghettiOs.

Cart We'lls

My boys were both booted out of the cart at early ages to make room for the next baby, and my daughter preferred to walk (clamped to my leg), so I can't claim much success in getting preschoolers to ride nicely. But here are ideas my friends claim worked for them:

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- Bring along a normally off-limits small toy like a handheld electronic game that can only be used while the kid is sitting quietly.
- Put a bigger preschooler in the back of the main part of the cart, with a firm rule that he must remain seated or lose his ride. (This technique is definitely not recommended by the safety folks, but I see people doing it all the time.) You can take two carts, one for groceries and one for kid(s), if you don't have enough room for the food. (It also helps to have two grown-ups for this system. And then you can divide and conquer, which has its advantages too.)
- Promise a zoooooom ride down a deserted aisle if the kid cooperates while you shop. Obviously best for off-peak hours shopping. Can be fun for everyone—just take care to avoid collisions.

Shopping on the Incentive Plan

ENTICEMENTS AND REWARDS

When I was a kid, I loved going grocery shopping with my mother and sisters. Really. This was because every time when we got to the bakery section, my mom got herself a cup of coffee and we kids got doughnuts. My mom says she did it for herself—a little pleasure to look forward to in a busy day—not to bribe us into being good. I tell this story because this treat has the elements you want in your incentive plan:

- ***ritual in nature*** (something you do each time, not as a reward or bribe, but just as a pleasure)
- ***modest investment*** (of both money and time)
- ***enjoyable to you too*** (not something you'll cringe at doing or giving to your kids)

You can arrange whatever treats you like, but here are some ideas (besides the good doughnut one) that have worked for people I know.

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Quartermaster

You cannot get out of the store without passing through the gumball gauntlet. One way to structure the gumball issue is to give your child a small weekly allowance of slightly more than a quarter (a dime per year



TALES FROM THE TRENCHES

For a few years around the holidays, I handed out quarters in the checkout line and told the kids they could choose something from the machines or put their coins in the Salvation Army kettle. We talked about poor children and hungry people, so they would know what was at stake, but I didn't pressure them if they chose the machines. But I was pleasantly surprised at how often they put their money in the kettle. And it meant more to me—and to them—that it was their choice to do so. (It was only later that I discovered that altruism was not their only motivation—they were competing *bitterly* to collect sets of the little cards the Salvation Army guy gave as thanks.)

of age was what we used). Your child can then *choose* whether to bring her quarter to spend in the machines. I also used to let the kids occasionally win quarters (one max per child) for playing our shopping games. Finally, our grocery store refunds five cents on each bag you reuse. If the kids reminded me and toted the empties, I let them have the money, up to twenty-five cents each.

Chooser

Because getting to be in charge of selecting something—cereal, snacks, Wednesday night's dinner—is very powerful and appealing to preschoolers, you can hand out the privilege as a reward for acceptable behavior. (Reserve veto power, though, or you'll eat nothing but macaroni and cheese and french fries for dinner on Wednesdays.) Want to make this privilege even more exciting? Give your kid cash to pay for his choice himself. Maybe you'll be really nice and let him carry the bag too.

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After Outings

This is one of the best. Promise a trip to the park or other fun place if you get your shopping (and putting away) done in the allotted time. One friend who passed a playground on the way home used to stop and let everyone out for five trips down the slide, then back in the car quick, before the ice cream melted.



MORE TO KNOW

Certain child expert types would firmly oppose shopping on the incentive plan, accusing you of bribing your kids to have good behavior or of creating materialistic, reward-oriented brats completely lacking in moral fiber and responsibility. I disagree with them. Used properly, built-in treats—and even explicit rewards—encourage not only good behavior, but also a warm relationship you'll cherish.

Shopper, May I?

AND OTHER FOOT UN-DRAGGING REMEDIES

These are good games for distracting your child from his professional whining practice and sometimes for getting him to pick up the pace.

Shopper, May I?

Have your kid ask questions à la “Mother, May I?” about how he can move toward your destination. For example, he might say, “Shopper, may I take six giant steps?” or “Shopper, may I take scissors steps all the way to the fountain?” If he asks about something you don't want him to do, respond, “No you may not. But you may...” In case you need a refresher course for Mother, May I, here are some of the kinds of steps: umbrella steps (Twirly—save them for open areas.), baby steps, slide steps (We called them banana steps.), bunny hops, backwards steps (avoid in crowds),

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heel-to-toe steps, horse steps (gallops), skip steps, grapevines, and leg crossers. Preschoolers also love it when you just grab their hands and skip with them—sing “Skip to My Lou” substituting your destination for “My Lou.”

Simon Says Hold Hands in the Parking Lot

Thank goodness for that Simon guy—commands issued by him are obeyed cheerfully and quickly. This, naturally, is not the time to try to trick your kid by mixing in non-Simon commands. But it is a good idea to throw in a few silly or fun commands, like “Simon says croak like a frog,” or “Simon says pick what kind of cookies we’ll buy.” And now and then, you might go along with a reasonable Simon demand from your kid, like “Simon says let me have a penny to make a wish,” just to build the spirit of cooperation.

Eye Spy to Buy

This game gives kids permission to move around (since they dash over to point out their guesses rather than simply naming them), but keeps them by definition within your sight. From your point of view, it’s a good idea either to give such specific hints that they can’t go wrong, like, “I spy to buy something orange and long and skinny. They grow under the ground, and rabbits like to eat them.” (carrots)—or something so general that you can sort-of cheat and let them win (or keep them from winning too quickly, as it suits you), like, “I spy something green.”

A variation is to have your child hunt for unusual items, like alligator pears. We found the game worked well in the produce aisle, where there were often exotic fruits and veggies we didn’t know already, and in places like hardware stores where there are bewildering varieties of cool tools and other objects. Sometimes we just have to buy whatever weird thing the kid identifies correctly. By the way, an alligator pear is an avocado.

Raceways

“Beat you to the candle shop—I’ll walk and you trot like a pony.” Three and four year olds fall for this trick pretty much every time. Fives and

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sixes may be onto you, and that's when you sing, "I've heard of Chicken Little, I've heard of chicken stew! I've heard of chicken chow mein, but now there's something new! Chicken (*child's name*)! Chicken (*child's name*)! Bock, bock, bock!" If necessary a little trash talking will usually lure the most skeptical kid into going along.

Speed Shopping Strategies

WHIPPING THROUGH WITHOUT WHINING

I think this is a corollary to Murphy's Law ("If something can go wrong, it will."): the bigger the rush you're in, the slower your kids will move. That's why it's a good idea to summon a little energy at the outset, and use a strategy like one of these to shift your kid into racecar mentality.

The Buckle Brigade

Getting in and out of the car at a speed faster than a glacier moves is often the biggest hurdle. I found it helped to get the kids ready to move quickly well before we reached our destination. I'd tell them to start unbuckling (or whatever they could do to help be ready) as soon as I put the car in park, and see if they could be done before I got their door open. Then I'd start narrating the approach: "Oh, I've spotted an empty parking space. I'm pulling in . . . braking . . . got the gearshift. . . . Parked!" This simple game worked over and over, but sometimes I'd dress it up a bit. You can do the same kind of thing getting back in: "Let's see if you can climb up in your seat before I can get the packages stowed," or something similar.

Surgical Strike

The old imagination strategy. You have lots of options, but my kids loved it when I pretended we were surgeons who'd been shrunk to enter the patient's body and remove some diseased organ (which was whatever we had to buy). Usually there was some terrible outcome, like a deadly fart explosion, that would occur if we didn't succeed in performing the operation by the specified time. I'd talk up the whole mission while we

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zipped around the store, making sure that we were constantly flirting with disaster. People will give you strange looks, but don't mind them. This game not only speeds up the process, but it also makes the kids giggly and cooperative, and that's worth a strange look any day, isn't it?

Other good pretending themes can include whatever your child's current passion is—dinosaurs, horses, fire trucks, fairy princesses, etc. Just make sure to narrate a theme of impending disaster and a need for speed. My kids were also fond of playing Mission Impossible (They loved being secret agents disguised as regular kids and retrieving the plans or codes cleverly hidden in a seemingly ordinary carton of low-fat milk.); being racecars (Naturally they were traveling under a yellow caution flag so they had to zoom without flat-out running.); impersonating astronauts avoiding space aliens and asteroids; and portraying ants saving the baby larvae from the attacking anteater.

Beat That Song!

Another strategy that requires you to sacrifice your dignity, especially if you sing as badly as I do. Sometimes I'd enlist one of the kids to sing instead, because even though they inherited my tin ear, at least they were a bit cuter. The point would be to get out of the store by the time we finished singing some longish, annoying song, a specified number of repetitions of a shorter one, or a medley. Probably the kids just rushed because they were embarrassed to be seen with their off-key and weird mother, but it was effective. Plus, people let you cut in front of them in the checkout line. You can also simply race the clock, but that's kind of boring, don't you think?

"Look with Your Eyes, Not with Your Hands" AND OTHER ENTRIES IN THE PARENTS' ESSENTIAL SHOPPING PHRASEBOOK

Probably you are already familiar with that glassy look that comes in your child's eyes whenever you start to give those lectures about how the

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store is full of breakies, and if something gets broken, then blah, blah, blah. That's why it's better to have a repertoire of shorthand phrases that you can insert at the perfect moment. Here are some of my favorite and most used one-liners.

"Look with Your Eyes, Not with Your Hands"

I scolded one of my kids one day for picking up some fragile item in a gift shop right after I'd just told her not to touch anything. She looked up at me with those big, innocent eyes that preschoolers know how to use so effectively and said, "But I wasn't touching it; I was just looking at it!" Preschoolers "look" with all their senses, hence the need to be very specific. I still use this reminder when roaming crafts fairs and art galleries with my tactile kids.

"Hands in Your Pockets, Please"

Ever notice how department stores always locate the crystal and china department between the entrance and the kids' clothing department? I suspect it's the store equivalent of a speed trap. Rather than telling kids not to touch, I found it more effective simply to have everyone thrust his hands deeply into his pockets. Sometimes I'd slip a coin or other goody in first—and if it was still there along with all the required fingers once we navigated the treacherous waters, the kid could keep it.

"Red Alert! Glue Zone!"

Big crowds, lots of commotion—in these circumstances you need your kid to stick to you like glue. Sometimes we called those places "hand-holders" too. Either way, the kids knew the shtick, attached their little bodies to ours, and most of the time got to skip the whole getting-lost lecture.

"This Is a List Trip"

In other words, your kid can skip the begging and whining—you're absolutely, positively not buying anything extra this time. Just make sure

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you mean it; slip up even once and this phrase will never work again. (It's also not a bad idea to dispense a small reward occasionally at the end of a list trip—like stopping at the park to play or handing out a snack you've brought with you).

"RYM"

Code for "Remember Your Manners." Say it to prompt your child to say thank you without embarrassing him with the standard, "What do you say?" (Especially since that phrase may prompt him to say something charming like "This is stupid.") RYM works to remind your child to use a wide variety of manners as he learns them and is especially useful for shy kids who are easily embarrassed.

It's Done with Mirrors

THE MAGIC TRICK OF DISTRACTING KIDS IN THE DRESSING ROOM

Personally, I prefer not to spend much time in dressing rooms with kids. Partly it's because preschoolers have a small reservoir of dressing room tolerance, no matter what amusements you provide. But mostly it's because I really prefer not to listen to the kids' blunt commentary on my stretch marks and spider veins, which always seem to glow like neon under the fluorescent lights. But if you're thicker-skinned—or lucky enough not to have VSOA's (Visible Signs of Aging)—these ideas may make the dressing room into less of a torture chamber.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Most kids will happily twist and turn and check themselves out in front of a mirror, especially if you get them started making silly faces and funny poses. For an extra dose of fun, you can tote a hand mirror in your purse and show kids how to turn their backs to the big mirror and look into the little mirror, adjusting the angle until they can see the backs of their heads

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and other interesting sights. And there's always the classic amusement of breathing on the glass and wiping off the condensation with a tissue.

Naked Barbies

Actually, you want to start with them clothed, as most preschoolers are much better at undressing dolls than dressing them. But many kids will enjoy playing dressing room with their dolls while you try on your own clothes. My kids liked finding assorted gross things on the floor to use as outfit accessories too. Then they'd have the dolls parade in front of the mirror. (I think that Mattel should make a Mommy Barbie complete with stretch marks and spider veins, don't you?) Boys who shun Barbies as disgusting girl toys may be content to undress G.I. Joes. Other small pretending toys will keep kids occupied too—just be sure to bring a stash of novel ones.

In a pinch, snag an extra outfit or two with large, easy fasteners (like big buttons with stretchy holes or oversized zippers)—and your child can pretend to dress an invisible person while you try on your clothes.

Hide 'n' Dress

Let's say you want to try on something like bathing suits without the scrutiny of your five-year-old son and there's no sitter available and you don't have time for mail order. I've found that hand-held electronic games will captivate boys so thoroughly that they wouldn't notice if Batman were changing in there. (Keep a game in your purse that's only available for these kinds of emergencies.)

But if you don't have such a perfect toy handy, (*and* you have a kid who isn't going to wander off and either annoy the heck out of other bashful folks trying on bathing suits or get you arrested for neglect), play one of these no-peek games:

- ***Under the Door Tennis*** Those little plastic size markers that go on hangers slide or roll back and forth pretty nicely. Give the kid a hanger for a racket or you can both play with your feet. Let the kid win.



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- ***Next-Door Neighbors*** Find adjoining dressing rooms, and park your kid in the one next to yours. Use conversation to occupy your child and keep tabs on him. Of course, you'll need an especially captivating topic to be sure your child stays put and happy. Try one of these:
 - A discussion of things people can do with worms (I actually spent twenty-five minutes once on this topic, and discovered as a bonus that it's a powerful appetite suppressant and helpful for shedding those extra pounds that are so unattractive in the suits you're trying on.)
 - Pretend you're prisoners in adjoining cells. You can discuss your wrongful convictions and share methods for taming the rats that visit your cells. Make plans for a jailbreak and a rendezvous at the fast food restaurant on the home, reminding yourself to order the salad and Diet Coke instead of the cheeseburger and fries.
 - Do some make-believe interior design of your respective dressing room "homes." Most kids are more than happy to pretend that their dressing room is a playhouse and make plans for equipping it to suit their tastes. We always liked to plan super cool features, like automatic cookie dispensers, twisty slides into the bed, indoor swimming pools with sprinkler attachments instead of boring tubs or showers, and other kid-fantasy features.

Can't You Hold It Until We Get Home? VISITING THE POTTY WHEREVER YOU GO

"We go before we go." That's a firm rule in my house, especially before shopping outings. Nonetheless, you will probably visit potties in some

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interesting places when out and about with your young child. The following ideas may help with common problems.

Advance Scouts

Especially if your child is newly potty trained, get in the habit of scoping out the location of the rest room before you need it. Stop at the checkout counter or service desk as you enter a store (especially if you'll be there for a bit) and ask where it is. Keep an eye on the time and schedule pit stops before you need them.

Adjusting the Fit

Graco makes a portable potty seat (available from the Right Start catalog at www.rightstart.com under health and safety products, as well as from larger baby supply stores). Boys can be boosted to pee-height by standing on your feet or bracing themselves on your bent knees. Many malls and airports now have family rest rooms with small potties—and privacy, so you don't have to fret about the six-year-old-boy-in-the-ladies-room dilemma. Some chain department stores, like IKEA, do too—and I make sure to give them my business. (By the way, I always take the six-year-old boy in the ladies' room with me—I'm sorry if it makes some women uncomfortable, but public rest rooms are not safe for young kids alone.)

Dealing with the Gross Factor

Most of the time, you really don't have to sweat it—kids are more likely to pick up germs in the Food Court than in the bathroom. (I still make my kids put the strips of toilet paper on the seat before they sit down, though, because my mom made me and now it's a Family Tradition.) What's more effective, though, is to carry Purell, squirt a little on a wad of toilet paper, and wipe the seat—and the flush handle—first. (You can also buy disinfecting towelettes, but they're expensive.) The sink area and doors often have more disgusting germs than the toilets do, so show your child how you turn faucets on and off with your elbows if possible,

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discard paper towels without touching the can directly, and use your body, not your hands, to open the door when you're done. (If the door pulls open, use a paper towel to open it and discard the towel in the nearest waste bin.)

Desperate Measures

- ***Finding a Toilet*** There are toilets for the employees in most businesses. Given the right persuasion (such as turning to your child and saying something like, "Try not to pee right on the carpet, dear."), you can probably gain access. If the clerk insists there is no toilet, ask where she goes—it's probably the nearest option.
- ***The Squeeze Play*** Have your child sit on a bench with her legs tightly crossed, while you tell her a short story. (Nothing with water or humor, please.) When she stands up, the urge may have temporarily passed, giving you enough time to locate a rest room.
- ***Isn't That What Landscaping's For?*** I never got that desperate, but I've caught more than one parent crouched behind the yews with a relieving tot. I also recommend carrying an empty plastic container (with a tight lid) in your car for emergencies.

Accidents Will Happen

Your child's comfort is your first priority. Keep telling yourself that. Tend to her first, being sympathetic—she's probably embarrassed and upset. Reassure her that it's no big deal and it's happened to plenty of other kids. Notify store personnel that you need a cleanup in aisle X, scoot your child to someplace private, and remove her pants altogether if you have dry ones or she's wearing a dress or long T-shirt. (I once bought inexpensive replacement clothes, when I really needed to finish my errands.)

High Anxiety

ELEVATOR/ESCALATOR ISSUES

Fortunately, serious accidents are rare, but small children are certainly at risk on people movers because of their ignorance of safety rules, their desire to touch and investigate, and their size. You need to make kids aware of the dangers without scaring them so much that they refuse to ride.

Escalator Safety Deputies

- Young children like being in charge of safety rules, so you might as well make it official. Then they can be the ones to nag about holding your hand, instead of the other way around. (Of course, then you won't be able to break the rules by toting the stroller up the escalator.)
- Before you get on, do a quick shoelace check—kids have been badly hurt when their laces got caught between steps or along the sides. Remind your child never to touch the steps; if something drops, you'll pick it up.
- Getting on and off the moving steps is daunting to many novices. I had good success by chanting a rhyme as we walked on—it distracted from their fear and helped them take smooth, even steps. Try reciting these lines and having the child walk forward on the word "stepping."

*One, two, three, four,
Stepping on this moving floor.
Five, six, seven, eight,
Riding up (or down) is really great!*

Have your child face front as you near the end. To exit smoothly, try a countdown or a traditional get-set rhyme like:

FUSSBUSTERS ON THE GO

*One for the money, two for the show,
Three to get ready, and four—let's go.*

Elevator Operators

- Teach your child elevator etiquette: wait for all the people to exit before getting on, step to the back so everyone will fit, and face forward while riding. Preschoolers who know their numbers (and can reach the buttons) may ask, “Floor, please?” but they must share the job with any other young riders.
- The biggest problems with preschoolers and elevators occur with the doors. We required an adult to get the door (with body or door open button) before kids got on or off. Be especially wary of older elevators, whose doors may not open automatically when they hit something.
- The other big problem is the possibility of separation. A good safety rule is that if a child somehow gets stranded on the elevator alone, he should *stay on until he returns to you. He should not get off, even if someone offers to help!* Let your child know that you will push the button for the elevator again and wait right there for him until the car comes back, even though it may take a while. He can sing a song or say his ABC's until he returns to keep from feeling scared.
- Okay, this isn't a safety thing, but it's a ritual my kids love when we have the elevator to ourselves. They jog in place and then try to time a jump for the moment the elevator stops—it gives them a momentary feeling of weightlessness.

The Toy Store Tango

TIPS FOR THOSE DIFFICULT SHOPPING EXPERIENCES

You'd think that wandering around a toy or candy store would be a treat for a young kid—but those kinds of shopping outings are the ones most

Un-Erring Those Errands

likely to cause complete meltdowns. There is simply too much stimulation, temptation, and frustration. Try these ideas to shorten the trip and cope with strong feelings.

Pre-shop

Try to make, or at least narrow, decisions before you enter the store. The internet makes this much easier. In addition to the well-known www.etoys.com, there are many other toy shopping sites, like www.toysrus.com and www.imaginarium.com, as well as homes for specific brands, like www.playmobil.com, where you and your child can browse without crowds or other distractions. I'm also a big fan of letting my fingers do the walking and calling to make sure the store has the item I'm looking to buy. If nothing else, help your child narrow the choices of what to purchase, so you don't have to roam through the whole store.

Prepare and Predict

Ahead of time tell your child why you are going to the store, how long you'll be spending there, and whether you will be buying anything for him. If he has a tendency to melt down, help him by predicting his reactions. You can say something like this: "Today we are buying a present for your friend Jake. Sometimes when we shop for a gift, you feel frustrated and wish we were buying something for you. Instead of crying or whining, I need you to squeeze my hand, take a deep breath, and use your words. Soon it will be your birthday, and then you will get presents."

Put Blinders On

I wish I could do it literally.

- Reduce stimulation by giving your child something to hold and focus his attention on. One of my kids liked to choose an unbreakable "look at" toy as we entered to examine while we shopped and to return when we checked out. Since we did this every time, it was a routine and rarely turned into a buy-it-for-me struggle.

FUSSBUSTERS ON THE GO

- Avoid aisles with lots of electronic toys and noises.
- If possible, shop during off-hours when the store is less crowded and when your child's energy level is higher.
- Sing, call his attention to a non-merchandise sight (e.g., "I wonder how many squares of tile there are in this aisle?"), or play a game (e.g., "Can you hop all the way over to the Barbie display?").

The Birthday List

I carry a pretty blank book (from the dollar store) with pages for each child. Whenever someone begs for something, I just ask, "Shall I put it on your list?" This technique isn't foolproof, but it's effective more often than I'd have guessed—especially if I make writing the entry into a solemn production. (And if you include useful information like store, date, and price, it can make later birthday shopping and suggestions to relatives much easier.)

The Ins and Outs of In and Out SURVIVING A SERIES OF SHORT ERRANDS

After the toy store, the worst shopping trips with young kids are those where you have to make a number of stops—too many transitions and too much getting in and out of the car seat. The following ideas can ease the stress on everyone and prevent some of the whining.

Schedule Sanity

Try to avoid these trips in the afternoon, especially with a child who is giving up naps (too much chance he'll fall soundly asleep on one of the short hops). I used to try to save a relatively fun errand (like the dollar store) for last, until I realized that everyone was so worn out by the end that they didn't even enjoy the reward. I switched the fun activity to the middle, and it worked much better. Also, pay attention to the total time of

Un-Erring Those Errands

the outing, and be sure to schedule breaks to eat, pee, or dash about a bit if necessary.

Lists You Can Touch—or Eat

Probably you get a feeling of satisfaction from crossing finished tasks off your to-do list. Preschoolers do too, but they prefer lists that they can get their hands on—or sink their teeth into. Try hanging a chain of plastic links, paper clips, or paper from the car seat or rearview mirror, with a link for each errand to run. As you finish each task, your child can remove another link. This activity will distract him as he gets in the car again, and it provides a visual picture of how many errands remain. One mom I know makes her kids “necklaces” from LifeSavers or other round candy, with beads for each leg of the journey. Another gives the kids coins to deposit in a tube—when it’s full, they stop for ice cream.

Imagination can also make the errand list more appealing. Pretend each stop is a different country (or continent) on an around-the-world trip, or a new planet with interesting aliens and landmarks.

You Can Bet on It

Which errand will take the least time? Which one the most? Have your kids make bets on various categories, and check your performance. This activity also focuses your child’s attention on something positive. You can hand out small rewards, like a piggyback ride across the parking lot or a quick treat.

Ritualize It

One dad I know always gives his kids money to buy a single “pretty” stamp of their choice when he takes them to the post office. They add them to the kids’ stamp collections, but you could also have a ritual of mailing a letter or postcard to your child with it. Another family I know puts the kids in charge of collecting wire hangers to take back to the dry cleaners (who gives them lollipops in exchange). These little habits make the kids look forward to otherwise dull errands.