



Challenging Behaviors in Public Places

For children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), challenging behaviors occur for many reasons. It is important for them to have appropriate skills when trying to get, avoid, or cope.

- Observe a behavior to determine where it happens most and least. Perhaps it happens with specific people, at certain locations, during certain times of the day, or as a result of particular sensory experiences.
- Consider the child's perspective when attempting to determine what's motivating the behavior. Seeing a challenging behavior from his or her point of view can help to prevent or respond more effectively.
- Teach appropriate skills when the child is not in the environment where the behavior occurs. For example, teach walking together, waiting in line, sharing toys, or tolerating transitions at times when these skills can be practiced without other demands. When the child behaves correctly, it can be helpful to provide immediate and meaningful reinforcers to encourage appropriate behaviors and motivate continued learning.
- Visual aids can help the learning process by illustrating and describing appropriate behaviors. These tools can include social stories, schedules, and videos. Timers are helpful to give the child a sense of how long he or she will be doing something. A template to create social stories, as well as other helpful tools, can be found at www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness.
- Routine errands such as going shopping can be challenging for children with ASD. At first, it may be helpful to go for short trips or to get familiar with the environment and social interactions. Many things can happen during an outing, so try to be as prepared as possible. Bring along toys or activities that are enjoyable.
- Before you take the child to a new and unfamiliar place, it may be helpful to find out about the location before you go. By going there first, reviewing the website, or calling the facility, you can ask about the location from the perspective of the child's challenges and needs. This information can help you prepare for potential issues at that location.
- People with ASD may need to take breaks when engaging in activities outside of their routine or comfort level. Help the child establish a way to let you know they need a break, help, or a place to go to calm down.
- Although it may be difficult, if challenging behavior occurs, try to remain as calm as possible. Adding additional tension to the situation may aggravate it even more. Take a deep breath and think about what will protect the child and those around and what will help calm him or her. Sometimes it may be finding a safe and quiet location. Going out with other family members or friends can provide additional support if difficult challenges arise. Having back-up from those who understand what to do can provide encouragement and assistance as needed.
- When in public places, people may not understand the behaviors that are related to autism. It may help to have a card available that can be given to others to raise awareness.

