

A Trip to the Shops

A friendly, flexible guide for autistic children
and the grown-ups who support them



PLAN TOGETHER

My needs matter

MY CHOICES

My needs matter

PAUSE OR LEAVE

My needs matter

This guide is for you.

Shops can have bright lights, sounds, smells, people and lots of choices. This guide helps you and your grown-up make a plan that can change. You can write, draw, point or ask someone to read with you. You can skip any part. A short visit, a break or going home can be the right plan.

Before we go

A little planning can make a shop visit feel more predictable.



Make the plan together

My grown-up can tell me which shop we are visiting, what we might do there and about how long we might stay. A photo, picture list or simple plan can help.

Bring what helps me

I might bring ear defenders, a comfort item, a small activity, a drink or a familiar bag if it is useful.

Plan for changes

We can decide what to do if it is busy, an item is not there, I need a break or I want to leave.

What would I like to know before we go?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Which shop are we visiting? | ☐ What are we looking for? |
| ☐ Who is coming with me? | ☐ How will we get there? |
| ☐ Where can we take a break? | ☐ How can we leave early? |

Something I want my grown-up to know:

MY PLAN

My shopping plan

Fill this in together, draw it or add pictures.

The plan belongs to me too

I can help choose what we look for, how long we stay and what might make the visit easier. It is okay to change the plan or decide today is not the right day.

We are going to:

I am going with:

We are looking for:

We can leave when:

My visit in four steps

FIRST

Get ready

NEXT

Go to the shop

THEN

Find or choose

LAST

Leave and rest

My pause or finished signal is:

My grown-up can help

My grown-up stays responsible for road, car park, door and shop safety. They can also help with choices, paying and asking staff questions.

One thing I want to ask for:

Arriving at the shop

I can take a moment to look around and understand what happens next.



First, I can get my bearings

My grown-up can show me the entrance, the plan and where we can pause. I do not have to rush in or choose something straight away.

Staying together

My grown-up and I can agree how to stay close, especially near doors, roads, car parks and busy aisles.

One step at a time

We can look for one item or do one part of the visit, then check whether to continue, pause or leave.

What could help me feel more settled?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ A short picture list | ☐ A quieter aisle or time |
| ☐ Ear defenders or a hat | ☐ A trolley, basket or no basket |
| ☐ A clear place to meet my grown-up | ☐ A warning before we change aisle |

My grown-up can explain changes

If something is different from the plan, my grown-up can tell me what changed and offer a simple next step.

Sounds, lights and choices

There is no one right way to shop. My comfort matters.

I can notice what my body is telling me

A shop might feel fine at first and harder later. I can ask for help, use my signal or take a break before I know exactly why I feel uncomfortable.

Things that might help me

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Lower lights or fewer people | ☐ Ear defenders or quiet |
| ☐ A familiar item in my hand | ☐ A list with only a few things |
| ☐ More space around me | ☐ A seat or quieter area |
| ☐ My grown-up speaking for me | ☐ Leaving before I feel overwhelmed |

I can choose how to join in

I might point, speak, use AAC, write, show a picture or let my grown-up help. I do not have to explain everything.

A choice can be changed

I can choose an item, ask for more time, say no or decide I am finished. I do not have to buy something to make the visit count.

No pressure to keep going

My grown-up can help me pause, step outside together or go home. A shorter visit is still a successful visit if my needs are respected.

What helps me when a shop feels too much?

Finding things and paying

I can help in ways that feel okay to me.

I can look, choose or wait

I might help find an item, carry something light if I want to, point to a picture, or stay beside my grown-up. I can also take a break while my grown-up finishes.

I can ask or show...

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Can I have more time? | ☐ Can we find a quieter place? |
| ☐ Can my grown-up ask? | ☐ I want to look at the picture |
| ☐ I do not want this one | ☐ I need a break |
| ☐ Can we skip this item? | ☐ I am ready to go |

At the till

Queues and sounds can be hard. My grown-up can explain what is happening, let me wait in a calmer place with them if safe, or choose a different plan.

Paying is grown-up work

My grown-up handles money, payment, receipts and any questions with staff. I can watch, help or take a pause.

If a choice is unavailable

My grown-up can explain simply and offer a small number of alternatives, or we can leave that item for another time.

What part would I like to do?

If I need a pause

I can tell my grown-up when I need a change.



My signal can be words or actions

I can say or show PAUSE, HELP or FINISHED. I can point to a picture, use AAC, gesture, move closer to my grown-up or communicate another way.

My grown-up can help by...

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Using fewer words | ☐ Giving me time |
| ☐ Finding a calmer place | ☐ Offering one clear choice |
| ☐ Staying with me | ☐ Helping me leave safely |

Helpful grown-up words

"We can pause." "Would you like a quieter place or to go home?" "You can show me." Then wait and listen.

Please remember

I do not have to finish the list, stay for a certain time or keep shopping to prove I can cope. My grown-up can help us leave safely whenever I need.

After the visit

I can take time to recover before talking about what happened.

Rest can be part of the plan

I might need quiet, less talking, a familiar activity or time with my comfort item. My grown-up can remind me of the next steps when I am ready.

Something that felt okay for me:

Something I would like to change next time:

A picture, word or feeling I want to remember:

A note for grown-ups

Keep the visit collaborative and pressure-free. Plan around the child's communication, sensory needs and safety. Offer choices that are genuinely available, and adapt or stop the visit when needed.

A good visit is one where the child feels listened to and supported.