OUR SHOPPING ADVENTURE

A Trip to the Shops, My Way



A trip to the shops can involve lots of little things: getting there, finding items, hearing sounds, waiting and coming home. We can make these steps more familiar together.

My way can be flexible

I can ask questions, show a card, take a break or need a different plan. I do not have to enjoy every part. A short trip can be enough.

Use this guide with a trusted grown-up. Read, point, draw, talk or skip a part. The grown-up helps plan and makes decisions about safety.

BEFORE WE LEAVE

We can make a small plan

Knowing a few things before we go can help. My grown-up can tell me what we know and explain that some things might change.

Where?

Which shop are we visiting? We can look at a photo or a simple route.

With whom?

Who is coming with me? Who can help me during the trip?

What for?

What is our main aim? We could choose one planned item.

What next?

What will happen after shopping? Can we plan some recovery time?

A plan is a guide, not a test

We might buy fewer things, visit another time or leave together. We can discuss a backup before we go.

Our shop or place:

My grown-up and our main aim:

For grown-ups: check opening times, access, toilets and possible places to pause. Some shops offer quieter sessions or assistance. Check locally; quieter does not necessarily mean fewer customers. [2]

TRAVELLING AND STAYING TOGETHER

My grown-up helps keep me safe

We can talk about travelling by foot, car, bus or another way. We agree how to stay together and what help I need. My grown-up remains responsible for supervision.

Near roads and in car parks

We put screens away. My grown-up chooses a safer place to cross and helps me stop, look, listen and think. We cross together when it is safe. Traffic can move even when we are close to the shop. [3]

Inside the shop

We can agree what staying together looks like for me. My grown-up can show me a staff point, till or help desk before we begin. We can practise how I would ask for help or show a card.

If I cannot see my grown-up

I use the plan we agreed. I stay in a safe nearby place away from exits and traffic, and seek a shop staff member, till or help desk. I do not go outside to search. My grown-up tells staff immediately.

How we will stay together:

Our agreed staff/help point and separation plan:

The adult should adapt this plan to the child’s communication and support needs. Do not rely on a child remembering these instructions in distress.

COMFORT AND SENSORY CHOICES

What might I notice?

The same shop can feel different on different days. I might notice bright lights, music, checkout beeps, smells, crowds or waiting. My grown-up can help me notice what makes things harder and what helps. [1]

Something familiar

A comfort item or familiar support may help me.

A quieter option

We can ask about a quieter time or a place with less input.

My communication

I can point, type, speak or show a message.

My body needs

We can plan suitable food, drink, toilet access and rest.

We can notice early

I do not have to wait until I am very upset to ask for help. My grown-up can offer a pause and reduce questions when processing feels hard. [1]

Something I want my grown-up to know:

Things we could take that help me:

For grown-ups: sensory tools are optional and individual. Consider how they affect awareness of the surroundings. Adjust support for roads, car parks and the child’s needs.

FINDING ITEMS AND PAYING

One step at a time

A short shopping list can show what we are looking for. My list might use words, photos or drawings. I can help find something if I want to, or let my grown-up do that part.

First, next, then

First: find a planned item.
Next: choose what happens with the basket.
Then: my grown-up helps us pay or leave together.

If an item is different or missing

We can ask for help, discuss another option or leave that item today. My grown-up can tell me before changing something I expected. I do not have to agree to an unexpected replacement.

At the checkout

There may be a queue, beeps, people talking or a change of checkout. I can show my grown-up that I need support. My grown-up handles the real payment and helps us keep track of our belongings.

Our short list: item 1

Item 2, if we want one:

Item 3, if we want one:

Buying more is not a measure of success. Visiting without buying anything can also be part of a planned trip.

PAUSING AND CHANGING THE PLAN

We can choose a different next step

A shop can be busier than expected. A queue can be longer. An item might be unavailable. These changes can be hard, even when somebody else thinks they are small.

Pause together

Tell or show my grown-up that I need a moment.

Reduce the task

Choose fewer items or let my grown-up finish a part.

Ask for help

A staff member may be able to explain an option.

Leave together

We can go home or try another time.

A break is a real need

My grown-up can help me move to a safer, quieter place with less input. There may not be a special quiet room. We need an alternative if our first choice is busy or unavailable. [1]

A place we could pause safely together:

Our backup if this place is not available:

What I can say, point to or show:

MY WORDS AND COMING HOME

I can show you what I need

These messages are choices. We can use my own words or familiar symbols. Speaking is not the only way to communicate.

I need a break.

Please help me find a quieter place.

Please help me.

I need support with the next step.

This is different.

Please tell me what we can do now.

I am ready to leave.

Please help us change the plan.

Afterwards, I may need recovery time

I might want quiet, movement, suitable food or drink, a familiar activity or fewer questions. We can reflect later. There is no score for staying longer, being quiet or hiding my needs.

After our trip, I would like:

Something that helped:

Something we could change next time:

The interactive version lets you personalise a support message, show it large and print it. A message supports communication; it does not guarantee a shop can offer a particular adjustment.

OUR PRINTABLE PLAN

Make it ours

Agree the details together and check them again on the day. We can add pictures, point to choices or ask our grown-up to write.

Shop and main aim:

My trusted grown-up / travel plan:

Staying together / staff or help point:

What we will take / what helps:

Our pause place / backup if unavailable:

If we become separated:

After the trip:

For grown-ups

Adapt the plan to the child's age, communication and support needs. Respect signs of discomfort and allow time to recover. A child's silence does not show that they are comfortable. The grown-up is responsible for supervision, safety decisions and seeking appropriate help.

Further information: [1] National Autistic Society: sensory processing. [2] Hounslow SEND Local Offer: sensory-friendly shopping. [3] THINK!: safer journeys. Checked November 2026.

An educational planning guide, not an assessment or a guarantee of safety. Activities and prompts are original resources. Use alongside the child's individual support arrangements.