Activities for “Decreasing Supermarket Tantrums”

Learn how researchers helped a family improve their child’s behavior in the grocery store. These activities and sample grocery lists can be used with the tips.

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Decreasing Supermarket Tantrums: Background and Tips

In a recent case study, researchers used pre-teaching and reinforcement (rewards) to decrease problem behavior in the grocery story on family shopping trips. The child who participated in the study was an eight-year-old girl with autism. The child's current verbal skills included the ability to make one-word requests. The child was reported to have frequent problem behavior when denied items that she wanted.

First, the researchers observed the family on shopping trips, noting that problem behavior occurred in approximately 62% to 78% of the time intervals they observed. During these preliminary observations, the family left the store if a problem behavior (tantrum) occurred, which was what they generally did before participating in the study. These preliminary observations are referred to as “baseline” and they took place before the researchers used any strategies to reduce the problem behavior.

The researchers had two strategies that they used to help reduce grocery store tantrums: pre-teaching shopping skills and allowing the child to earn a treat for good behavior at the end of the shopping trip. Over two weeks, the researchers and parents worked with the child at home in a “mock” grocery store set-up at home. They used prompting and errorless teaching to teach the child to gather items from a grocery list and place them into a toy shopping cart.

Once she learned to gather fifteen items at home, they started practicing in a real grocery store. At first, the child was only asked to find three items, then was given a small treat if she gathered the items with no problem behavior. The number of items she was asked to shop for was gradually increased with each successful shopping trip, until she was able to help shop for fifteen items at a time. At the end of each shopping trip with no problem behavior, the child continued to receive a small treat.

How Can You Use This Research?

The researchers used several helpful strategies to help prepare this child for shopping trips including priming, shaping, and errorless teaching.

Priming is a strategy that parents can use at home to help their children prepare for upcoming activities. The idea behind priming is to preview an event before it happens. This helps the child know what to expect and feel more comfortable with the event. Priming should be a low-stress and fun activity, with lots of opportunities for the child to receive reinforcement (praise or rewards for participating in the activity). In this study, the researchers used priming by setting up the mock grocery store at home, in which the child was taught to shop for items with a toy grocery cart. For more information on how to use priming: [http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/Priming.pdf](http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/Priming.pdf)

Shaping refers to teaching a child a new skill in small steps. A bigger skill or task is broken down into smaller parts, so that child can learn and be successful one step at a time. This allows the child to be reinforced (praised/rewarded) for each small success leading to the smaller goal. This helps keep children motivated to continue learning while working on a large goal. In this study, the researchers used shaping by first having the child shop for only three items in the store before receiving her treat. When the child was successful with this, the child was asked to shop for a few more items on the next shopping trip (maybe five or six) before receiving her treat. It was increased again on the next shopping trip, maybe asking her to shop for eight items before receiving her treat. This gave the child something else to do (rather than tantrum) during the shopping trip and allowed her to earn a treat. For more information about using shaping: [http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/Shaping.pdf](http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/Shaping.pdf)

Errorless Teaching is another strategy for helping a child learn a new skill used in this study. For information on how to use errorless teaching, visit these sites: [http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/ErrorlessLearning.pdf](http://www.txautism.net/uploads/target/ErrorlessLearning.pdf) [http://www.christinaburkaba.com/ELvsNNP.htm](http://www.christinaburkaba.com/ELvsNNP.htm)

For more information about the strategies the researchers used, read the article:

Decreasing Supermarket Tantrums by Increasing Shopping Tasks: Advantages of Pre-Teaching Tasks

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Step 1: Match Picture to Object

Before teaching the child to shop in the mock grocery store, he or she needs to know that the pictures on the grocery list represent real items. This “match pictures to object” activity can help.

Gather your toy food items. If you can use real items (such as an empty egg carton or empty popcorn box) this is best.

Here are the steps to teaching:

1. Print 3 copies of page 5. Place one toy food item on the top of each page (not covering the small box). Place the three pages/items in view of the child.
2. Hold the 3 printed pictures that match the toy food items.
3. Give one to the child and say, “Match.” The child should place the picture in the small box (a visual cue for what to do). Note: If you usually use a different instruction for this type of activity, it’s fine to use it.
4. If the child doesn’t respond, you can do the first one while the child watches, then repeat step 3 with another picture.
5. When the child correctly matches, give verbal praise (such as “Good job!” or “Nice match!”) and a reinforcer (a small reward of something a child likes, such as you blowing bubbles once or playing for a brief time with a favorite toy). This reward lets the child know his or her answer was correct and provides motivation to continue the task. For more information on how to use reinforcement, click here.
6. Once the child can match three pictures and objects at a time, you can increase the number of matches shown to the child at once. For example, you can next sit out 5 matching pairs, then 7, and so on. Probably about 10 at once would be a maximum goal.

If your child or student has worked on matching pictures to objects already, you may be able to skip some or all steps. You can also reverse the process and have the child match the objects to the pictures.
Cards for “Match Picture to Object”
Step 2: Practice Shopping

Now you’re ready to practice shopping. You’ll need:

• A toy shopping cart,
• A shelf in your home or classroom to put play food on,
• The printed shopping list on page 8.
• The toy foods pictured on the shopping list.

Start with just teaching the child to “shop” for two items. There are a few ways you could do this.

1. Make a video of yourself or a sibling/peer taking the toy food items off the shelf and putting them into the cart. Make sure the video shows the person shopping getting verbal praise and a reinforcer after all items are put in the cart. Show the video to the child right before you want him or her to practice shopping.

2. Have the child watch you or a sibling/peer do the activity in person. Make sure to provide verbal praise and a reward to the person doing the shopping practice. Then, give the child a turn to practice.

3. Go through the practice shopping with the child, providing a hand-over-hand prompt to get each item and put it in the cart. For this method, you’ll take your child’s hand and physically guide him or her to take the items and put them in the cart. Provide verbal praise and a reinforcer when all items are in the cart.

Once the child can successfully use the first shopping list (consistently and without prompting), you can use the other shopping lists which have more items. On each shopping list, the items are listed in a different order, so that the child does not become fixated in a certain pattern when shopping.

The shopping list contains boxes that the child can check off, if you would like. This is optional and might be better for older children or children who have some writing skills.
Shopping List

- apple
- bananas
Shopping List

- popcorn
- bananas
- apple
Shopping List

- bananas
- jelly
- carrot
- apple
- popcorn
Shopping List

- eggs
- bananas
- jelly
- grapes
- carrot
- apple
- popcorn
Shopping List

- eggs
- apple
- jelly
- grapes
- carrot
- bananas
- tomatoes
- popcorn
Shopping List

- eggs
- apple
- corn
- jelly
- grapes
- carrot
- bananas
- tomatoes
- popcorn
- potato
Grocery Store Flashcards

You can use these flash cards to help practice the names of the grocery items. Included are one set with the names of the items printed on them, and one set of items without labels.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peanut Butter</th>
<th>Milk</th>
<th>Mayonnaise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot Dogs</td>
<td>Buns</td>
<td>Soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal</td>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>Eggplant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucumber</td>
<td>Lettuce</td>
<td>Broccoli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Price Wars!
Cut out each food item and paste them in order from lowest price to highest price.

Name: ____________________________ Date: ___________________

$0.58
$2.10
$0.99
$3.30
$0.75
$1.25
$0.33
$1.00
$0.88
$0.17
Credits

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