

# Before You Go to the Mall with Your Child

By Terri Mauro, About.com Guide

Malls can be overwhelming places for children who have trouble with noise and activity and keeping their hands to themselves. That doesn't mean you can never go shopping with your kids along, but it does mean you have to plan carefully. These five tips will make your trip shorter, smoother, and less stressful.

## Set a time limit

Figure out how long your child can control her behavior in the noisy, active, distracting environment of a shopping mall. Subtract 10 minutes. Set that amount of time as your absolute, unbreakable deadline for getting in and getting out of the place. If you have an alarm on your watch or your cell phone, set it and don't forget it.

## Make a plan

Figure out what you can reasonably do within the time limit you've set. Be realistic. Don't count on being able to rush around frantically, or find everything you want instantly. Schedule yourself for a few stops, then out. And choose a time when the mall is least likely to be packed with people. Take a pass on those big sale days, or find a babysitter and leave your child at home.

## Pack supplies

If your child has an iPod, this is a good time to bring it along. If you have a bag of tricks for your child, make sure it's in your purse or pack. Snacks that won't make too much mess and a juice box or two can keep kids busy in a crunch. Books, Game Boys, portable DVD players, travel games, toy cars, a doll or two -- whatever can be easily toted and deployed to distract, bring it along.

## Bring a friend

Shop with your spouse, your sister, your most understanding friend. But don't shop with your kids and no other adult support. A spare grown-up can wait outside with kids and snacks while you run into stores, supervise little ones while you try on clothes or squeeze between racks, or spirit an out-of-control child to the car while you finish up. Don't leave home without one.

## Have an escape route

Maybe you miscalculated your child's tolerance. Maybe you're both having a bad day. Maybe there's something extra stressful at the mall. Whatever the reason, if your child loses the ability to behave in an acceptable way, don't argue or cajole or bribe or threaten or whine. Just get the heck out of there. Right now. Be aware, every moment, of how you'd go about doing that.