

Making Life Easier

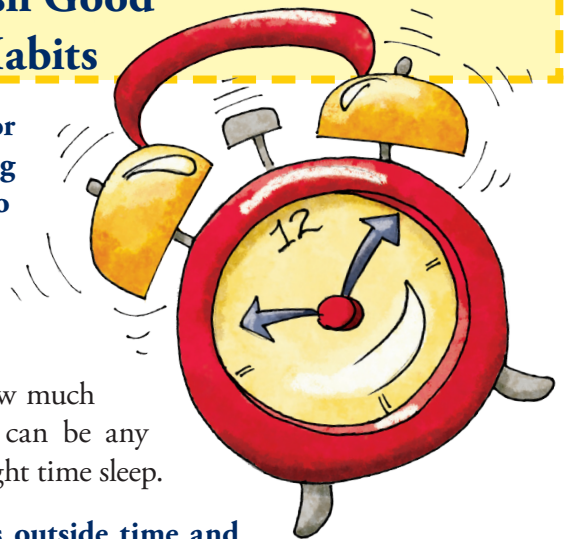
By Pamelazita Buschbacher, Ed.D.

Illustrated by Sarah I. Perez

Bedtime and Naptime

Many families find bedtime and naptime to be a challenge for them and their children. It is estimated that 43% of all children and as many as 86% of children with developmental delays experience some type of sleep difficulty. Sleep problems can make infants and young children moody, short tempered and unable to engage well in interactions with others. Sleep problems can also impact learning. When a young child is sleeping, her body is busy developing new brain cells needed for her physical, mental and emotional development. Parents also need to feel rested in order to be nurturing and responsive to their growing and active young children. Here are a few proven tips for making bedtimes and naptimes easier for parents and children.

Tip: Establish Good Sleep Habits



- ★ **Develop a regular time for going to bed and taking naps, and a regular time to wake up.** Young children require about 10-12 hours of sleep a day (see the box on the last page that provides information on how much sleep a child needs). Sleep can be any combination of naps and night time sleep.
- ★ **Make sure your child has outside time and physical activity daily,** but not within the hour before naptime or bedtime.
- ★ **Give your child your undivided and unrushed attention** as you prepare her for bedtime or a nap. This will help to calm her and let her know how important this time is for you and her.
- ★ **Develop a bedtime and naptime routine.** Help your child be ready for sleep. Babies and young children thrive on predictability and learn from repetition. They like and need to know what is happening next. It

is important to establish a routine that both you and your child understand and find calming and relaxing. Bedtime routines usually involve undressing, bathing, dressing in pajamas, brushing teeth, toileting for older toddlers and preschoolers, story and/or prayers (for children developmentally older than six months). The order and content will be different for each family depending on the developmental age of your child, the traditions of your family, and the needs of your child's specific disability.

- Do and say the same things before naps and bedtime. This helps your child transition from active play to sleep.
- Establish a predictable place for sleeping. If you want your child to sleep in his own bed, put him down in his own bed. If you would like your child to nap in her room, guide her to sleep in her room. If you begin the bedtime routine in another location (e.g., the rocking chair) and then move the child when sleeping, your child is likely to wake up during a light sleep cycle and become confused about her surroundings.

★ **Help your child understand the steps in the napping and bedtime routines.**

- First..., then... statements help your child understand and predict what will happen next. You might say, "Sara, it's time to take a nap. First, let's find teddy. Then we can pick a book to read. Then we can climb into bed and cuddle."
- Your child might benefit from a picture schedule or a picture book (photos, clipart, objects) of the steps in her napping or bedtime. This can help her understand the steps and expectations of the routine. It can also help other adults and babysitters put her to bed in a similar manner. Supporting others who put your child to sleep in a way that you have found works will be very reassuring and calming for your child and for them.

★ **Tell your child what might happen when she wakes up.** The day might have been so much fun that your child does not want to take a break for a nap or go to bed for the night. Follow your calming routine, reassuring your child that the fun will continue when she wakes up. You might want to talk with her about what will happen when she wakes. You might want to show

her a picture of what is going to happen after she sleeps. For example, you might say, "First, sleep. Then wake up and we go to the park." You might use pictures of sleep and park to help your child understand.

- ★ **Carry a favorite transition object to bed** (e.g., a teddy bear, a blankie, a book). A transition object becomes another signal to the child that it is time to go to sleep. Some children prefer an object that is soothing to touch or cuddle while resting.



★ **Provide your child with calming, rest-inducing activities, sounds or objects in the routine.** Avoid activities that might excite your child in the hour before bedtime or nap. It is not a time for roughhousing, tickle games, or active play. It is not a time for DVDs or computer games. In fact, you might have an easier time with the naptime/bedtime transition if your child is not engaged in a favorite activity when it is time to start the naptime or bedtime routine. It is important that your routine helps your child prepare for resting and sleeping. Some possible soothing items and activities include sucking a pacifier, hugging a blankie or soft animal, looking through or reading a favorite book, soft music on the CD player, being rocked, a back rub, or singing a lullaby to your child. Reducing the noise and light in the room and nearby rooms is rest-inducing for many young children.

★ **Put your baby or child down for sleep while she is still awake.** Say "good night" and leave the room. By putting your baby/child down before she's asleep, she learns to go to sleep on her own, an important skill for the rest of her life. If she falls asleep routinely in your arms or a rocking device, she might get disoriented or scared when waking up in her crib or bed, rather

than cozy and comfortable in your arms. She will not have learned how to put herself back to sleep without your help. When placing your child in her bed, you can provide her with soothing sleep aids such as her security blanket, a stuffed animal, a pacifier, or quiet music.

Tell your child that you will be back to check on her shortly and then be sure to return in a few minutes. She might cry for a few minutes. If so, you can help her settle down again and then leave the room. You can return to her room on regular intervals to offer comfort, but you should not take your child out of bed.

- ★ **Avoid certain foods and drinks six hours before sleep** (e.g., sodas, chocolate, fatty foods). A little tummy that is digesting sugary, caffeinated or fatty foods can keep a child alert and awake.
- ★ **Try breast feeding or offering a warm bottle just before bed.** Milk can induce a deep sleep. However, if your child is being potty trained, avoid milk three hours before sleep because it may cause them to have an accident during the night. Remember that a child should never be put to bed with a bottle as that causes serious tooth decay. You want to also remember to help your child brush his teeth after any snack or drink that is given prior to sleeping.
- ★ **Provide choices whenever possible.** Providing choices for your child has proven to be a powerful strategy in preventing challenging behaviors. Choices you offer at bedtime could be whether the night light stays on or off, what toy the child takes to bed, the story you will read, or if the door is open or shut. This gives your child a feeling of control and helps your child cooperate with your requests. When offering

choices, make them concrete and limited (only 2 or 3 choices). For example, you could let your child choose which pajamas to wear (given 2 choices), when to go potty (e.g., before or after brushing teeth), who will give her a bath (e.g., mommy or grandma), or what book to read (given 3 choices), etc.

★ **Reduce noise and distractions in and near her room.**

You want to help your child fall asleep by reducing the distractions or things that make her stay awake. For example, if your child would rather stay up and watch television, turn it off until she is asleep. If it is still light outside, consider shades or curtains that darken the room. If adults or other children are talking or playing, consider asking them to move away from the child's room.

When an infant or a young child sleeps in a room with the television on or loud conversation happening, she comes to rely on these to fall asleep but doesn't truly get the restful sleep she needs. If it is not possible to keep the environment quiet, consider playing soothing music near the child to block out other sounds (a ticking clock, fish tank, or fan might also work).

- ★ **Reduce light in the room.** While you want to darken the room, your child might find it reassuring to have a small light on in the room or her bedroom door open slightly and a light on in the hall.
- ★ **Make sure your child is comfortable.** Check the temperature; what is comfortable for you might be chilly or too warm for your child. Your child might need the security of pajamas that are snug fitting or an extra blanket. She might feel cold even when you think the room is just right. She might need the fan on or off.



Tip: Consider keeping a sleep diary for a week.

Some children are erratic in their sleep patterns. You might feel at a loss for predicting how much and when she sleeps. A sleep diary is a written log of when your child falls asleep, when your child wakes up, and a calculation of the total amount of sleep for each day. You might also want to write comments about any events that happen that day that could be related to your child's sleep cycles. The sleep diary might help you see relationships between napping and sleeping at night or the consistency of bed- and naptimes. If your child has challenging behavior related to going to bed; you can also write down information that describes the behavior challenges and how you responded. This behavior log could provide you with information about when behavior challenges are likely to occur and what you or others might be doing to reinforce (i.e., pay off) the behaviors. This will help you get a clearer picture of what works and doesn't work in helping your child fall asleep and sleep well.

Tip: Look for the signs of sleepiness.

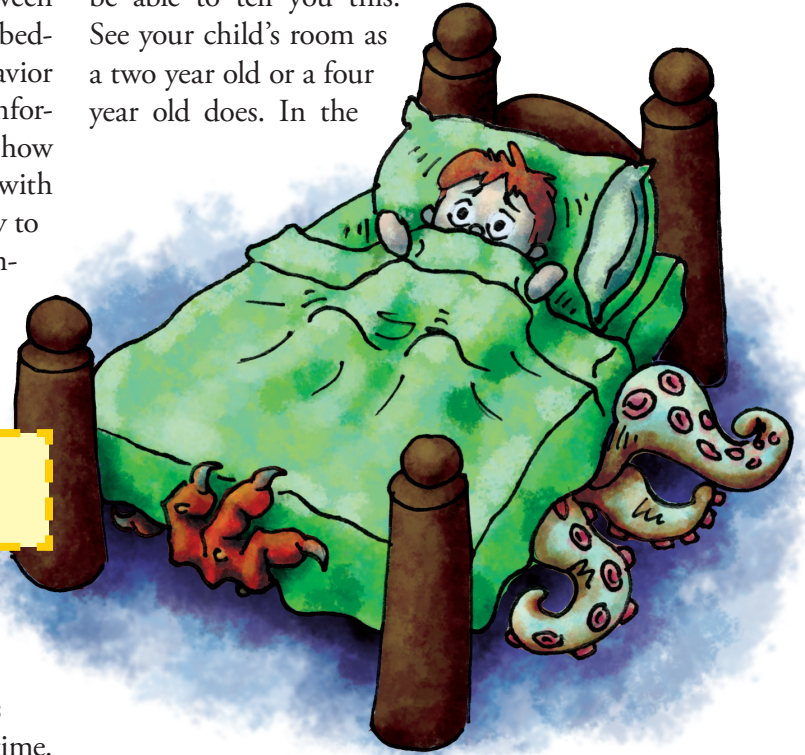
There are always signs that your child is getting tired. Think about how your child shows you that she is getting tired. Share these observations with others who help put her to sleep. When your child is sleepy, you should assist him in taking a nap or at bedtime. Signs of sleepiness in infants and toddlers might include yawning, difficulty focusing, turning her face away from objects or people, rubbing her eyes or nose or pulling her ears, falling down or having difficulty pulling to a stand, and losing interest in play. A sleepy baby might arch her back and lean backwards when you hold her. A preschooler might also show the same signs or might have trouble playing with others, complain of a tummy ache, refuse



to follow directions or eat, or become aggressive with others (e.g., pushing, hitting, biting, etc.). Some children become more active when they are tired in an effort to stay awake. Your child might just get "grumpy."

Tip: Talk with your child about his fears.

For a young child, there really are monsters in the room. Your child might tell you he is scared or he might not yet be able to tell you this. See your child's room as a two year old or a four year old does. In the



darkness of his room, shadows of toys or furniture might seem frightening. If your child expresses fear, let your child know that you understand his fears (e.g., "you are feeling scared.") and then provide reassurance or comfort (e.g., "That is your toy box making a scary shadow, let me move it so it won't look like a ghost."). Then provide her with a soft toy to hug and other calming activities and/or items suggested earlier. Relock the window, pull down the shade or pull the curtains shut. Check in the closet and under the bed. If your child is afraid of the dark, put a dimmer switch on the light. Start with the light on and gradually dim the light over several weeks. Let your child know that you are nearby and that you will make sure she is safe. Your child might need to know where you will be when she is sleeping, even if you need to use a photo/picture. If you need to remain in the room for your child's safety, keep the light off or dimmed, remain quiet, and avoid interaction.

If your child cries or gets out of bed, be supportive and let her know you understand her fears. You might say, “I miss you, too. I’ll be in the living room. You’ll be fine. We’ll have fun in the morning.” Calmly return her to bed, make sure that she still has her calming items, reassure her, kiss her good-night, and leave the room.

Tip: Celebrate the little successes along the way!

You might say, “You are getting to be such a big girl, sleeping in your bed with your teddy.” Your child’s restful sleep makes for a restful you. Then you are both ready for shared days of family fun and learning.

In closing, please remember that the team of professionals that support you and your child will have additional specific ideas about how to help your child. Don’t forget to ask them! Your child’s speech therapist, physical therapist, teacher, or other professional should be able to help you think about the best way to support your child within daily routines and community activities. If your child is having persistent challenging behavior within this activity, you should ask the professionals who work with you to help develop a behavior support plan that will provide more specific strategies to prevent challenging behavior and help your child develop new social and communication skills.



Is my child getting enough sleep?

Age	Nighttime	Daytime
1 - 3 months	8½ hrs - 10 hours	3 naps (total of 5 - 7 more hours)
6 - 9 months	11 hours	2 naps (total of 3 - 3.5 hours)
12 - 18 months	11¼ hours	1 or 2 naps (total of 2 - 2.5 hours)
2 years	11 hours	1 nap (90 minutes - 2 hours)
3 years	10½ hours	1 nap (90 minutes - 2 hours)

* Your child will probably transition out of naps between 2-5 years of age.

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children
www.challengingbehavior.org

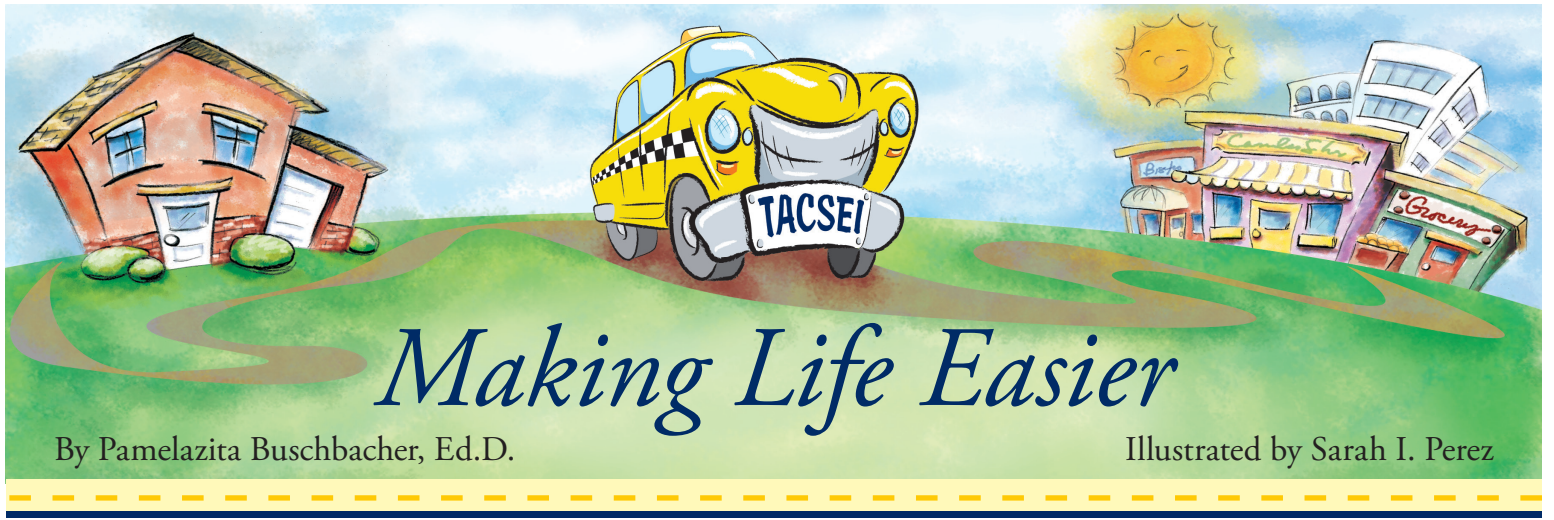


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Making Life Easier: **Bedtime & Naptime**

- ★ Make sure your child gets plenty of **exercise** during the day.
- ★ Develop **regular times** for bed and naps and stick with them.
- ★ Develop a bedtime and naptime **routine**.
 - Do and say the same things before naps and bedtime.
 - Establish a predictable place for sleeping.
 - Help your child understand the steps in the routines (e.g., use “first, then” statements, picture schedule).
 - Tell your child what might happen when she wakes up.
 - Let your child carry a favorite transition object to bed.
 - Provide your child with calming and rest inducing activities, sounds, or objects in the routine.
 - Put your baby or child down for sleep while she is still awake. Say, “Good night.” and leave the room.
- ★ Give your child your undivided and unrushed **attention**.
- ★ **Avoid certain foods** and drinks six hours before sleep (i.e., sodas, chocolate, fatty foods).
- ★ Try **breast feeding** or offering a warm bottle just before bed.
- ★ Provide **choices** whenever possible.
- ★ **Reduce noise**, light, and distractions in and near your child’s room.
- ★ Keep a **sleep diary** so you will know what’s working (or not).
- ★ **Celebrate** the little successes along the way.



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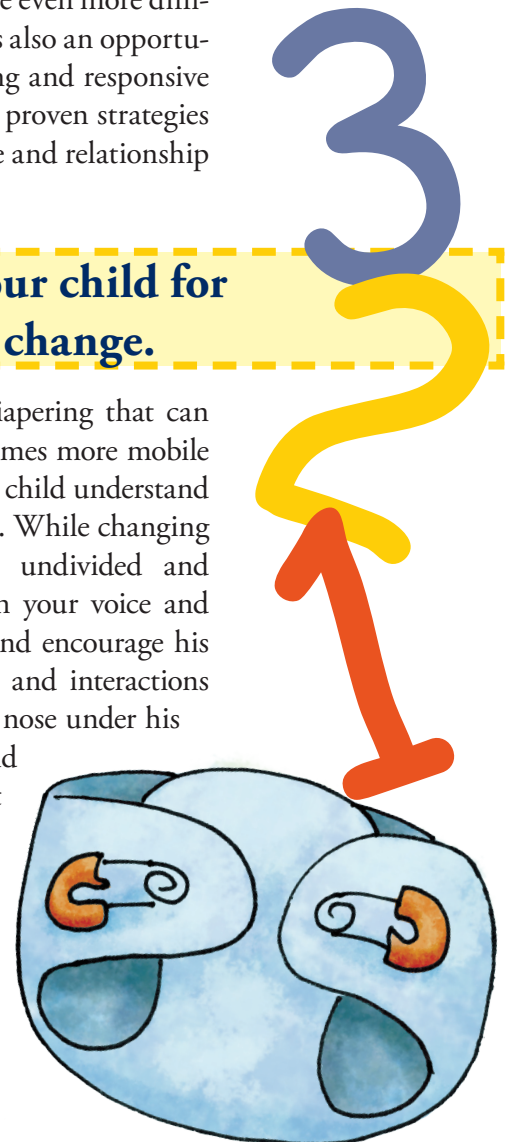
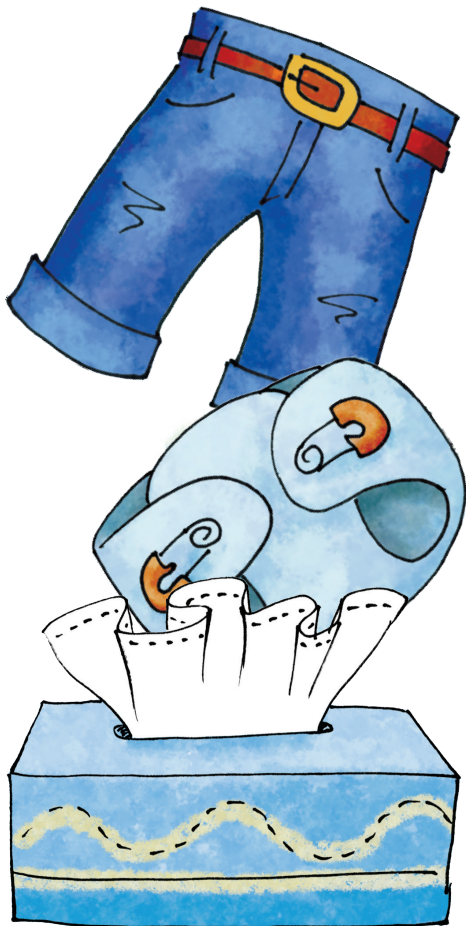
Illustrated by Sarah I. Perez

Diapering

For many families, changing a child's diaper becomes a major battle. This routine is one that is often not as scheduled or predictable as other activities. It is often unpleasant for adults and not an activity that the young child enjoys. As your child grows older and becomes more mobile and interested in interacting with his world, diaper changing might become even more difficult. While it can be challenging, it is also an opportunity for building a positive, nurturing and responsive relationship with your child. Several proven strategies can help to make diapering a positive and relationship building experience for both of you.

Tip: Prepare your child for the diaper change.

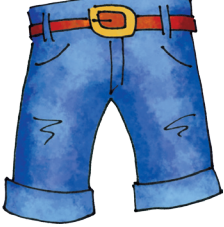
Develop a predictable routine for diapering that can change as your child grows and becomes more mobile and independent. A routine helps the child understand what will happen and what to expect. While changing your child, give your child your undivided and unrushed attention. The calmness in your voice and manner will most likely calm him and encourage his cooperation. Respond to his sounds and interactions with gentle touch, nuzzles with your nose under his chin, eye contact, soothing sounds and words. Respond in soothing ways that you know comfort him and you both enjoy. Babies and toddlers thrive on predictability and learn from repetition. They like and need to know what is going to happen next. The following are strategies that will help your child learn to cooperate with the diaper changing routine.



- **Provide a transition warning.** Most young children need help in transitioning from one activity to another especially if they are engaged in an activity that is enjoyable. It's difficult for a child to move from an activity he really enjoys to one that he does not like.
 - You might try giving him a **verbal warning** and say, "Tommy, I think it is time to change your diaper. We'll change it in five minutes. Okay?"
 - Another transition strategy is to **set a timer** and when the timer rings, it's time to change the diaper. For example, you can set the timer for 5 minutes and warn your child when the bell rings it will be time to change his diaper. Remind him as the time gets closer. You might say, "Look, Mason, 2 more minutes, then we change your diaper." You can use a kitchen timer to help your child or purchase a visual timer that shows the time counting down (your child's teacher or therapist would be able to tell you more about where to purchase a visual timer).
 - You might use a **countdown or count up** strategy and make a game of the transition. You might say, "Hmm, someone has a poopy diaper. Who can it be? I think it is Sammy. Let's change your diaper. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Diaper change."
- **Provide choices whenever possible.** Providing limited choices to your child is a powerful strategy for the prevention of challenging behavior. Limited choices that can be offered during diaper change might be about what toy to bring to the changing table, where to do the diaper change, turning the lamp on or off. This gives your child a feeling of control, supports your child's communication, and encourages your child to cooperate with your requests. Offering limited choices (2 or 3) versus many
- prevents your child from engaging in a game where you keep offering different things and your child keeps saying "not that one." Your child could choose who might change him (Daddy or Nana), where to be changed (on the floor or on the couch), or what to hold (diaper, wipe, or pacifier). You can communicate the choices for your child with words, pictures, or by showing your child an object. When you offer choices by presenting objects, pictures, or using sign language, say what the options are in addition to showing the child the choices (even if your child has a hearing loss).
- **Empathize with your child's feelings.** If your child pouts, says "not now, Mommy," ignores you, screams, or runs away, provide a label for how he might be feeling and follow through with the diapering. You might say, "You look sad (angry). I know you want to go out and play. Here, hold your blankie. First, change your diaper. Then we can go out and play." Your empathy will help your child understand that you respect how he feels but that it is still necessary to change his diaper.
- **Use or allow your child to choose (with limited options) a transition object.** This is something (e.g., diaper, book, blankie, bottle, etc.) that the child can take with him and hold or suck (e.g., pacifier, bottle) during the diapering process.



- **Ensure that the transition is smooth** and encourage your child's cooperation by letting him know what will happen after you change his diaper with the use of a **"First..., Then..." statement**. You might say, "First we change Micah's diaper. Then we can go outside to play."
- **Many parents have found success with using a picture for each step of the routine** using photos or clip art. The steps might look something like what is listed below for changing Micah's diaper. For each step, the underlined word would be represented with a photo or picture.

<p>1. Get 1 <u>diaper</u>.</p> 	<p>2. Get the <u>wipes</u>.</p> 
<p>3. <u>Lie down</u>.</p> 	<p>4. <u>Pants off</u>.</p> 
<p>5. Dirty <u>diaper</u> off.</p> 	<p>6. <u>Wipe</u> bottom.</p> 
<p>7. <u>Diaper</u> on.</p> 	<p>8. <u>Pants</u> on.</p> 

9. All done diapering. (happy face)



Not only does this explain the process for your child, but it also ensures that others (e.g., grandparents, babysitters, etc.) will conduct the routine in a similar and predictable way. For children who can't see a picture, you might use an object or your words to guide your child through each step.

- **Encourage your child to be a helper in the routine.** Active participation in the process builds your child's self confidence, independence, and problem solving abilities. You might say, "Shelby, time to change your diaper. Please help me find what we need. Hmm. Where do we keep the diapers? (wait) Oh yeah. Thank you. Now we need the wipes. You are such a big helper. Thank you."

Tip: Minimize unwanted movement.

Some children become very active during diaper changing. When they wiggle around or resist, it places them at danger of falling off the changing table and it makes it difficult for the adult to complete the routine. The following strategies are suggested for keeping your child from wiggling all over the place.

- **Reduce distractions in the diapering area.** A pet or others running around the child only makes him want to get up and join the fun.
- **Describe what you are doing in a fun way.** You could do this in song. You might sing, "This is the way we take off your diaper" (to the tune of "This is the way we wash the clothes") or use some other melody that's bouncy. You could use "First...Then" statements. You could say, "First we take off you overalls. Then I take off the wet diaper..." and so on.

- **Let your child help as much as possible.** You can ask your child to help such as “Can you hold your legs up high? Hold the diaper for Mommy? Open the powder for me?”
- **Use interesting distractions.** Laugh and comment on these as you are diapering your child.
 - You might play peek-a-boo, sing his favorite song or a do favorite finger play (e.g., "itsy, bitsy, spider").
 - Use a toy (e.g., binoculars, stuffed animal, etc.).
 - Use stickers - one on each of the child’s hands.
- **Plan a preferred activity or event** to follow diapering.

Tip: Celebrate you and your child’s successes along the way.

Children need to hear in concrete ways what they have done well. You might say, “Thanks for being such a ‘big boy.’ You really helped me diaper you.” or “No more poopy diaper. We did it!” For older children, use natural consequences, such as, “Now your bottom will be clean and not feel sore!” Or “Now you can put on pants and go outside, because you are all dry!”

In closing, please remember that the team of professionals that support you and your child will have additional specific ideas about how to help your child. Don't forget to ask them! Your child's speech therapist, physical therapist, teacher, or other professional should be able to help you think about the best way to support your child within daily routines and community activities. If your child is having persistent challenging behavior within this activity, you should ask the professionals who work with you to help develop a behavior support plan that will provide more specific strategies to prevent challenging behavior and help your child develop new social and communication skills.



Making Life Easier: Diapering

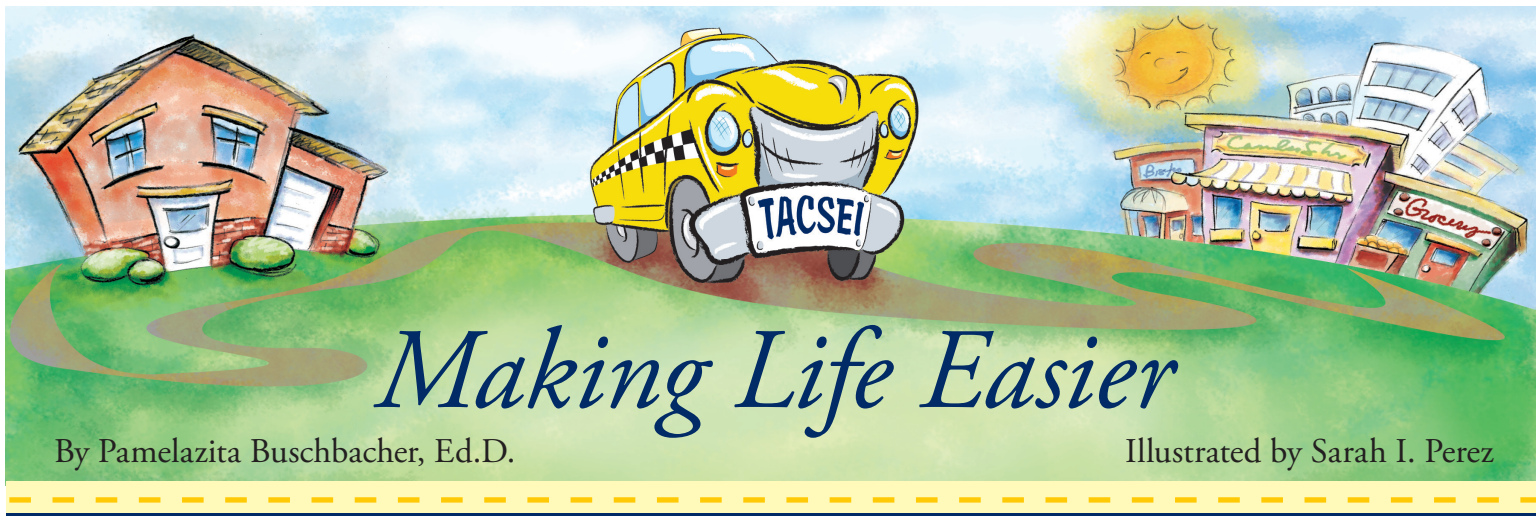
1. Prepare your child for the diaper change.

- ★ Use a **transition warning** (verbal, timer, count downs or count ups).
- ★ Provide **choices** (who, where, when).
- ★ **Empathize** with your child's feelings.
- ★ Provide a **transition object**.
- ★ Use **"First..., Then..."** statements.
- ★ Use step by step **pictures**.
- ★ **Encourage** your child to be a helper.

2. Change the diaper.

- ★ **Reduce distractions** in the room.
- ★ **Describe** what you are doing in a fun way (e.g., sing, make up a rhyme).
- ★ Let your **child help**.
- ★ Use **"First...Then"** statements.
- ★ Use **interesting distractions** (toy, stickers, book, etc.).
- ★ Say **"all done"** to end the process.
- ★ **Plan** something your child and you will enjoy when finished.

Celebrate your child's successes along the way!



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Running Errands

Running errands (e.g., going to the store, bank, etc.) is one of those essential household routines that all families experience. It is often thought of as a “maintenance” activity that is necessary for the family, but not enjoyable for young children. However, there can be huge benefits in taking your young child along. He learns about his community while spending time with someone he loves and trusts, someone who can help him understand the world beyond home and family. Running errands together offers the chance to build self-confidence, curiosity, social skills, self control, communication skills, and sensory exploration. He’ll have opportunities to greet and interact with other children and adults with your guidance and support. He will also be able experience the myriad of smells, tastes, sounds, and textures of the greater world within which he lives.

However, running errands can be extremely difficult if the child has challenging behavior. It’s not uncommon for families to feel overwhelmed by their child’s challenging behavior and resort to only running errands when someone else can care for the child at home. Sometimes, depending on the errand (e.g., a long shopping trip, parent visit to the doctor), that might be the best strategy. Still, there are steps you can take to help you and your child get the most out of these outings.

Tip: Plan for the transition from home to going out.

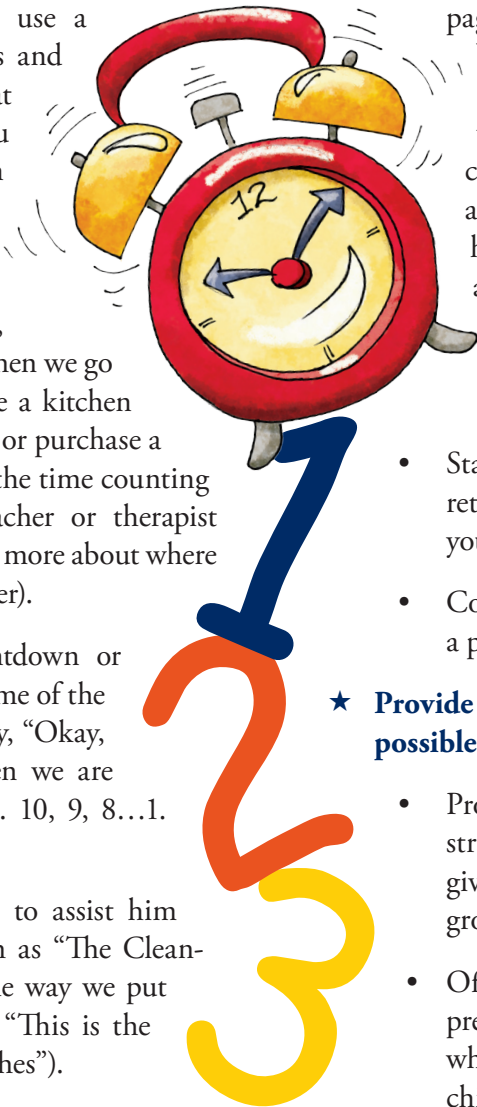
Let your child know where you both will be going. This can be done verbally, visually (timer, gesture, using sign language) and/or with sound (timer, count-down). Remember to allow time for the transition. Young children need time to shift their focus from one activity to another.

★ **Provide a transition warning.** It is a given that if you have a young child, he is going to have some trouble with transitioning from one activity/place to another.

- You might try giving him a verbal warning and say, “Nashon, we have to go to the store in 5 minutes. When you are done with your puzzle, we can put your shoes on.”



- Another strategy is to use a timer set for 5 minutes and let your child know that when the bell rings you are both going to get in the car to run a few errands. Remind him as the time gets closer. You might say, “Look, Barry, 2 more minutes then we go to the car.” You can use a kitchen timer to help your child or purchase a visual timer that shows the time counting down (your child’s teacher or therapist would be able to tell you more about where to purchase a visual timer).
- You might use a countdown or count up and make a game of the transition. You might say, “Okay, I am counting and then we are going to the post office. 10, 9, 8...1. Ready to go.”
- You might sing a song to assist him with the transition such as “The Clean-up Song” or “This is the way we put on our socks” (tune of “This is the Way We Wash our Clothes”).



★ **Tell your child where you will be going.**

- “First..., then...”: You can do this verbally, such as, “Mikey, we are going to run two errands and then we’ll be right back to watch a video. First, we are going to the bank. Then we are going to the post office. Then we’ll come home and watch your Barney video.”
- Some children need a more concrete and visual support of where they are going with you. Many parents have found great success with a travel book. This can be made with a small photo book with blank photo sleeves. To make a travel book, take photos of the places in your community that you frequent such as the bank, health food store, grocery store, post office, grandma’s house, the library, the park, etc. Place each picture in a photo page. As you prepare to run your errands, place the photos of the places you will go in sequential order (with home being the final

page) for your child. Describe where you will be going using the photos. For example, you might say “First, we are going to the bank, then to Grandma’s, etc., then home.” You can also use clip-art found on the internet or a picture from a magazine. Always end with home or a preferred destination (e.g., the park, a friend’s home). This strategy of planning for a naturally occurring reinforcer as part of your routine works better than bribing your child with an unrelated reward.

- Start with going to just one place and then returning home or to another favorite place of your child’s (e.g., McDonald’s, the park, etc.).
 - Consider planning your trips so that they include a place that your child would like to go.
- ★ **Provide choices for a transition object whenever possible.**
- Providing choices for your child is a powerful strategy in preventing challenging behavior. This gives him a feeling of control and supports his growing confidence and sense of competency.
 - Offering limited choices (2 or 3) versus many prevents your child from engaging in a game where you keep offering different things and your child keeps saying “not that one.” You might say, “Michaela, do you want bunny or baby doll to ride in the car with us?”
- ★ **Prepare a cooler with a snack, a drink and an ice pack.**
- Keep the travel cooler in your kitchen so that it is visible and readily accessible. When filling the cooler, allow your child to decide what snack/drink will go in it. Not only does your child get to make choices, he has the opportunity to help and is more motivated to run the errands with you.
- ★ **Prepare your diaper bag.**
- It is frustrating for you and your child not to have that needed item when you get somewhere. Keep a list of things that you need in your diaper bag or backpack (some families find that a backpack is easier to manage and allows you to have two hands free to guide your child). If possible, laminate the list. It’ll be more durable that way.

As you prepare to leave, read over your list to make sure that you have everything you need before heading out the door. If possible, enlist the help of your child in getting anything that you might need for the bag. If your child needs special supports such as a nebulizer or communication board, those items should be on your list. Additionally, it will help other adults and older children make sure that everything is in the bag.

Tip: Turn getting in the car seat into a game.

Keep in mind that young children love being playful about everything and that from 18 months on up they are interested in doing things independently.

- ★ **Make getting to the car a game.** (e.g., hop, skip, and follow the leader). Give him a choice of the manner for moving to the car. You might say, “Let’s skip to the car” or “Do want to hop or skip?” Or you can make it a race. You might say, “Can you get to the car by the time I count to 5?” (Just be sure to count slowly.)



★ **Buckling up the car seat:**

- Make up a song about buckling up. You might sing, “This is the way we buckle up...” (to the tune of “This is the way we wash our clothes”).
- Show him a picture of himself safely buckled in his seat. Keep it in his travel book.
- Encourage your child to help with “buckling up” as much as he is able. He could pull the strap over his shoulders and then it is Mommy’s turn to do the rest. You might say, “Shayna’s turn. Please, help me with the straps. Mommy’s turn. Snap. Snap. All done.”
- State the rule that the car cannot go until everybody has their seatbelts on.

Tip: Make your car a child-friendly place.

If your child is busy in the car, both you and he will have a happier experience.

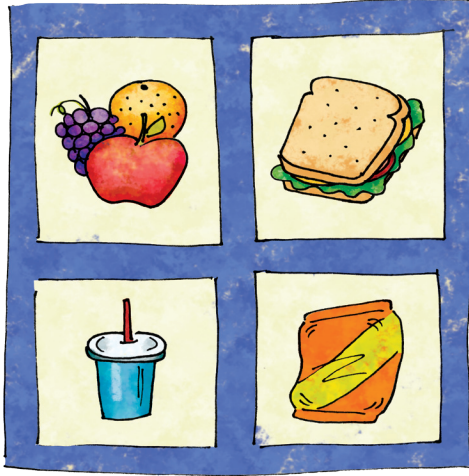
- ★ **Many parents have found it successful to have an activity bin in the car.** Fill the activity bin with a few of your child’s favorite things. Some examples might be a couple of books, markers and drawing paper, figurines, or a sticker book. You can create a bin by using any box or plastic, lidded container. Keep the bin in the car, but change the contents every week. By changing the toys, the bin is always interesting and fun for your child. Another option is to use a backseat organizer. These hang from the front seat headrest and contain compartments for storing toys, CDs, drinks/snacks, or the travel book. Some have mirrors to entertain younger children.

- ★ **Children’s music CDs:** There are many music CDs that have music and lyrics that both you and your child will enjoy. You’ll find some with songs from your child’s favorite television shows and movies. There are also music CDs that have songs with a school readiness focus that offer your child a fun way to learn how to count, say the letters, or learn how to rhyme, etc. Some CDs include songs about riding in the car (Sesame Street/Bert & Ernie, Going Riding in the Car) or everyday routines such as dressing, brushing teeth, etc. You and your child will have the opportunity to sing, laugh and learn together. This is a great way to make your ride to places enjoyable for you and your child.



Tip: Provide your child choices.

Use choices to prevent challenging behavior. When you offer your child a choice, you provide him with the opportunity to have control and be independent.

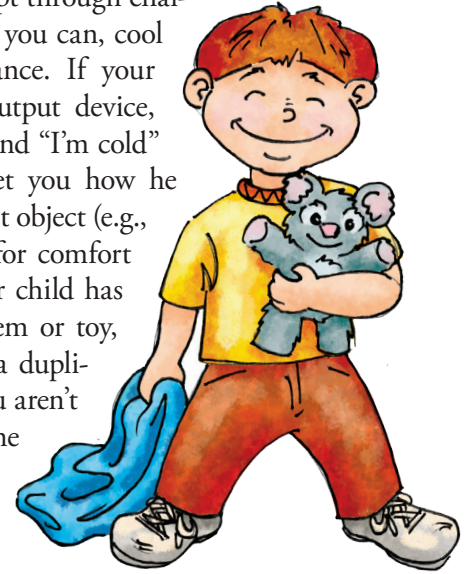


- ★ **If your child has limited communication skills, provide him with a choice board.** These are pictured choices from which he can tell you what he wants. They could be photos or clip art. You might have a page in his travel book of song choices, CD choices, or snack/drink choices, etc. Each picture can be velcroed onto a page in his travel book and he can point to the picture or give it to you to indicate his choice. For children who have vision impairments or blindness, you can offer a choice by handing your child two objects or pieces of objects and asking the child to make a selection.
- ★ **Let your child choose the music to be played.** You might like country music but it might not be his choice. Listen to it another time when you are in the car alone. A pleasant ride running errands will make listening to the Wiggles or a Raffi CD one more time well worth the effort. You might even enjoy singing with your child. Most children love this activity.
- ★ **Some families have DVD players and hand-held game systems for the car.** These are passive activities that don't promote learning or building a relationship with your child. You might want to save these for those

longer trips. Running errands are a great opportunity to interact with your child, create a pleasurable routine, and help your child learn.

Tip: Keep your child comfortable.

Make sure that your child is not too hot or cold. If he has limited language, he may not be able to tell you that he is uncomfortable (except through challenging behavior). If you can, cool the car off in advance. If your child has a voice output device, program "I'm hot" and "I'm cold" into it so he can let you how he feels. Have a comfort object (e.g., blankie) in the car for comfort and warmth. If your child has a special comfort item or toy, it will pay to keep a duplicate in the car so you aren't looking for it at the last minute as you are trying to leave the house.



These simple prevention tips can make getting in the car or on the bus to run errands much easier for your child. Once out of the house, you and your child can take care of these household tasks and have fun during your time together.

In closing, please remember that the team of professionals that support you and your child will have additional specific ideas about how to help your child. Don't forget to ask them! Your child's speech therapist, physical therapist, teacher, or other professional should be able to help you think about the best way to support your child within daily routines and community activities. If your child is having persistent challenging behavior within this activity, you should ask the professionals who work with you to help develop a behavior support plan that will provide more specific strategies to prevent challenging behavior and help your child develop new social and communication skills.

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children

www.challengingbehavior.org



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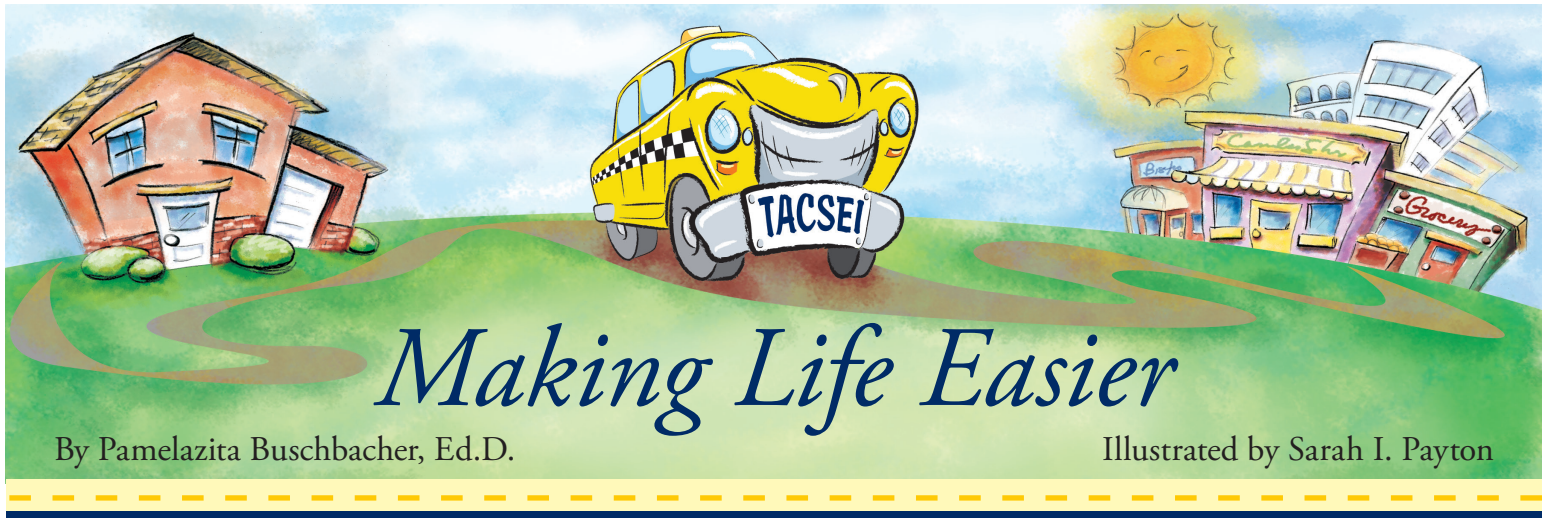
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Making Life Easier: Running Errands

- ★ Use a **transition warning** (e.g., verbal, timer, count down, sing a song).
- ★ **Tell** your child where you will be going.
 - Use “First..., Then...” statements.
 - Use a Travel Book.
 - Include one of your child’s favorite places.
 - Provide a transition object (toy, blankie, book, travel book, etc.).
 - Provide 2 or 3 choices for the transition object.
- ★ Prepare a **cooler**.
- ★ Prepare your **diaper bag** or a backpack (written list in bag).
- ★ Getting in the **Car Seat**:
 - Make getting to the car a game (sing, skip, hop, race, count to 10).
 - Make buckling up in his car a game (sing, encourage child’s your child’s help).
 - Show a picture of him safely buckled in his seat. Keep it in his travel book.
 - Insist that everybody has their seatbelts on before the car moves.
- ★ Provide your child **choices**.
 - Your child could choose music, toys, books, etc.
- ★ Make **your car** a “child friendly” place.
 - Keep an activity bin in the car. Rotate the contents every now and then. Allow your child to choose some of the contents.
 - Play children’s music CDs. Provide 2 or 3 choices. Sing together.
 - Cool or heat car in advance. Provide a means for your child to communicate how he feels.



Making Life Easier

By Pamelazita Buschbacher, Ed.D.

Illustrated by Sarah I. Payton

Going to the Doctor/Dentist

Doctor and dentist visits can be very stressful for young children. Routine check-ups can cause anxiety, fear and distress in toddlers and preschoolers. Some common fears for young children include:

- separation from you;
- pain and discomfort;
- stranger anxiety; and
- unfamiliar procedures and people.

The following tips will help ensure that these visits are easier for you and your child.

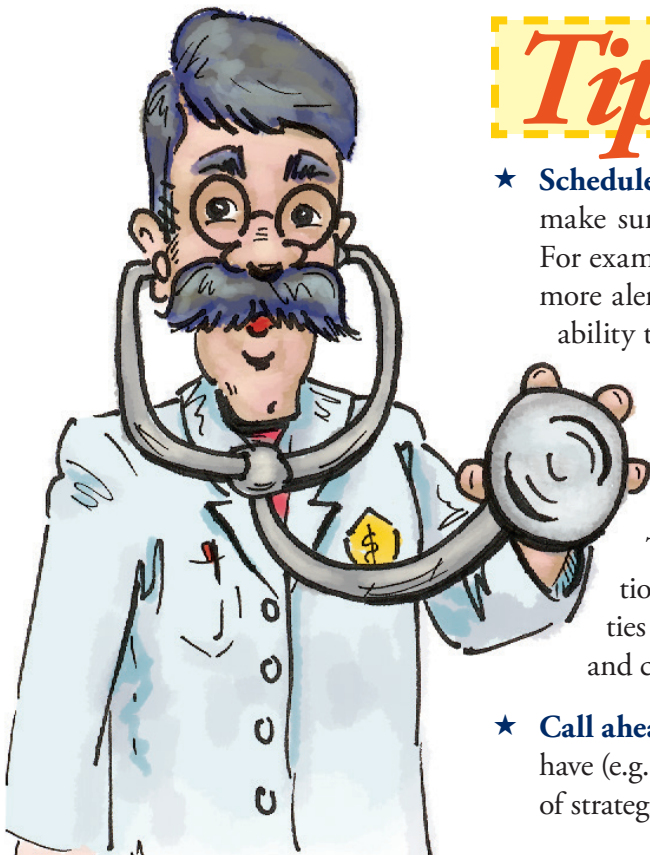


Tip: Prepare for the doctor/dentist visit.

★ **Schedule smartly.** When you make an appointment for your child, make sure to schedule a time that you believe will work well for him. For example, many children do best early or mid-morning when they are more alert. Avoid skipping naps or meals as this may lessen your child's ability to cope with any negative feelings he might experience.

★ **Choose well.** Choose a doctor/dentist who has experience working with young children and is open to making adjustments based on your child's special needs. Some doctors and dentists specialize in caring for children with developmental disabilities. This is especially important if your child has medical complications, communication and/or behavior challenges. Certain disabilities are at increased risk for dental problems (e.g., Down syndrome and cerebral palsy) and might need more frequent dental visits.

★ **Call ahead** and inform the staff of any special needs that your child might have (e.g., sensory issues, difficulty waiting, sensitive mouth and gums) and of strategies that work for him. Develop a plan with the staff for the actual



appointment. Be sure to focus on your child's strengths and strategies for success. You might want to have this conversation in person during a pre-appointment visit (see below).

- ★ **Pre-appointment visit.** If possible, stop by your doctor/dentist's office before your appointment date. If you are going to bring your child along for the visit, call the office and ask if you can meet the doctor/dentist and take a picture of your child and the doctor/dentist together. During the visit, check out the waiting room. Are there toys/books that your child would enjoy? Are the sights, sounds, or activity levels too stimulating for your child? If so, speak to the staff about other possible arrangements. Take pictures of people and objects in the waiting and/or examination rooms (e.g., fish tank, puzzles, books, the light over chair he will be sitting in, stethoscope, exam table, or other features) and create a personal picture story to read with your child in preparation for the actual visit. Read this to your child several times before the visit. Also, make sure to bring the picture story along to the visit as a reminder of what will happen, what the expected behaviors are, and what choices your child has. When children understand what is going to happen, they are less anxious which can increase cooperation and reduce challenging behavior.

Sample doctor/dentist routines are included with these tip sheets for you to use as a template for your child's personal picture story.

- ★ **Talk to your child about the appointment in advance.** Consider your child's individual needs and developmental level when deciding when to talk to him about the appointment. While some children may do well knowing a few days in advance, others may do better if told on the morning of the appointment.
- ★ **Role play the doctor/dentist visit** in advance using a doll or stuffed animal. Allow your child to take a turn at being the doctor, nurse or dentist. Show your child how the doctor/nurse will weigh him, measure his blood pressure, check his ears, nose and mouth. Demonstrate how the dentist or hygienist will look in his mouth, count his teeth and clean them. Do this



over and over again so that your child can understand the routine and procedures.

- ★ **Tell the truth.** Even young children can cope with discomfort or pain more easily if they're forewarned. You child will also learn to trust you if you're honest with him. If your child asks if he will get a shot or need medication, tell him the truth. Let him know what it might feel like and reassure him that you will be there for him. For example, use phrases such as "It will feel like a little pinch (a shot)" and "Daddy will be with you." If you need to leave the room, let him know where you will be.
- ★ **Share commercial books, television shows or videos** about visiting the doctor or dentist with your child. The pictures can help your child become familiar with what to expect at the visit and with the names of the objects and the people he may see at the office. A sample list of books follows these tip sheets. Your librarian or teacher/interventionist can help you find these as well as other books and videos.
- ★ **Pack a Waiting Bag.** Waiting in a doctor or dentist's office can be difficult for young children. Many parents find it helpful to take along a bag of favorite things for their child (e.g., books, markers and drawing paper, their personal picture story, doll or action figure, a comfort item or a sticker book). If possible, have your child help pack the bag so he can choose a few of the items himself. Providing choices for your child is a powerful strategy in preventing challenging behavior. You might say, "Do you want to take Mickey Mouse or blankie in your bag?"

- ★ **Read one of the other *Making Life Easier* articles, titled, *Running Errands*,** if getting your child in the car or on the bus for the trip is a challenge.

Tip: Remain calm and positive during the appointment.

Doctor and dentist visits can be stressful even for adults. It is important that your child sees that you are comfortable and confident in his doctor/dentist and staff. If your child becomes distressed during the visit, remember to respond calmly. Ask yourself what the meaning of the behavior is and what might have caused his distress. Once you understand the cause of your child's distress, you can respond with the appropriate strategy.

Tip: Inform staff of strategies that work.

When you interact with the staff of the doctor or dentist office, let them know that you will be using some strategies to encourage your child's cooperation and reduce the likelihood that your child will have behavior challenges. Office staff are usually more than happy to help make the visit go smoothly for the child.

Tip: Use support strategies to decrease the likelihood that behavior challenges will occur.

- ★ **Use your child's personal picture story.** The personal picture story can be read as you and your child are sitting in the waiting room and during the actual appointment with the doctor/dentist/hygienist as a reminder of what is going to happen next and his expected behaviors and choices. When children understand what is going to happen they are more likely to be calm which can reduce behavior challenges.
- ★ **Give clear directions.** Give your child a positive direction that assumes he will cooperate. For example, instead of saying "Manuel,

do you want to go see the dentist?" it is better to say, "We are going in the room to see the dentist. Let's go see what interesting things are in his room."

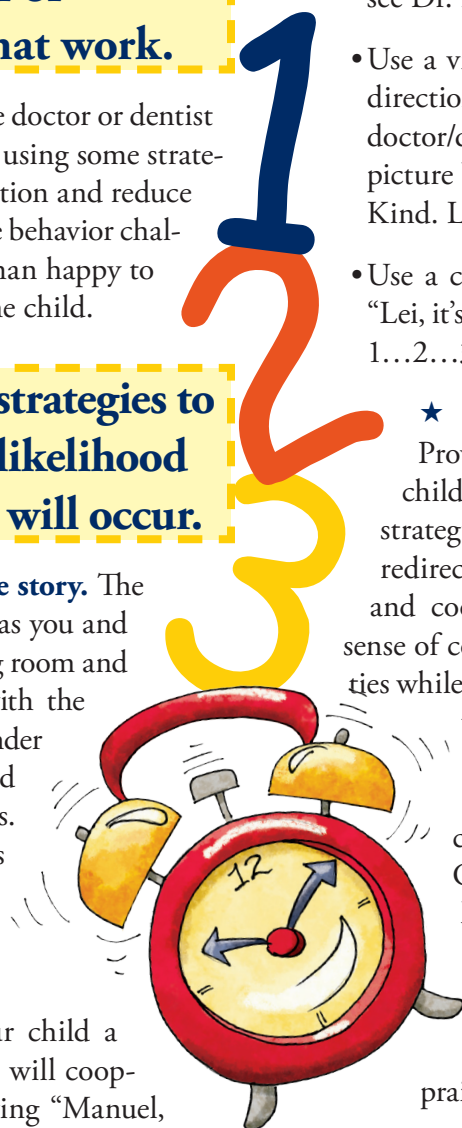
- ★ **Use "wait time."** A wait time of about 4 to 20 seconds is often all that is needed for a child to process and respond to a request. If your child hesitates, give him the wait time before you give another direction or demand that your child comply.

- ★ **Provide transition warnings.** Most young children need help transitioning from one activity to another, especially if they are engaged in an activity that is enjoyable. It's difficult for a child to move from an activity he really enjoys to one that he is uncertain of or does not like. To help your child transition, you might:

- Give your child a verbal warning. If he is playing with a puzzle, say "Maleek, I see the nurse. She called your name. I'll help you clean up. Let's go see Dr. Fares."
- Use a visual (picture) warning along with verbal directions. You might show a picture of the doctor/dentist or refer to your child's personal picture book and say, "Cooper, it's time to see Dr. Kind. Let's clean up and go see him."
- Use a countdown or count up strategy and say, "Lei, it's time to see Dr. Ortez. Let's count (pause). 1...2...3...4...5. Okay, let's go see Dr. Ortez."

- ★ **Provide choices, whenever possible.** Providing limited choices (two or three) for a child in a difficult situation can be a powerful strategy in preventing challenging behavior and redirecting a child to more acceptable behavior and cooperation. Choices help give children a sense of control over their surroundings and activities while still doing what needs to be done! Be sure that ALL the choices you offer are helping reach that goal! For example, if your child has to be examined or take medicine, you might say, "Charlie, let's help Dr. Care. You can sit on the table or sit on my lap. Then he will look in your ears."

- ★ **Provide frequent and specific praise.** Let your child know when he is being cooperative and helpful by praising him specifically for what he is doing.



For example, you might say, “Danny, you played and waited so nicely in the Waiting Room. Let’s tell Daddy.” “You were so brave. Now the shot is all done. No more shots.”

- ★ **Empathize with your child’s feelings.** If your child cries, hits, bites, screams or runs out of the waiting room or examination room, provide a label for how he might be feeling and reassure him. Avoid punishment or threats (e.g., “If you don’t sit still, I am going to spank you.” and negative, and usually, untrue comments “Big boys don’t cry.” or “There is nothing to be afraid of.” Let your child cry and comfort him by hugging, patting or using a soothing touch.
- ★ **Follow the appointment with an activity that your child likes** (e.g., a visit to the library or local park). Make sure this is something you can both enjoy together.
- ★ **Brag about your child’s behavior** to a family member or a friend in front of your child.
- ★ **Encourage your child to share his experience** with another adult such as a parent, grandparent, or friend.

Tip: Celebrate the little successes along the way.

In closing, please remember that the team of professionals that support you and your child will have additional specific ideas about how to help your child. Don’t forget to ask them! Your child’s speech and language therapist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, teacher, or other professionals should be able to help you think about the best way to support your child in their daily routines and community activities. They are usually more than willing to help you make any needed specific supports (for example, a waiting bag, a personal picture story, etc.). If your child is having persistent challenging behavior, you should ask the professionals who work with you to help develop a behavior support plan that will provide more specific strategies to prevent challenging behavior and help your child develop new social and communication skills.

Children’s Books to Prepare Your Child for Doctor/Dentist Visits

Your library and bookstore have many books that help children predict and understand what might happen during a doctor or dentist visit. These are some good examples.

- Going to the Doctor* by Terry Brazelton, MD. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 1996.
- Going to the Dentist (Mr. Rogers)* by Fred Rogers. New York, NY: Putnam Juvenile, 1989.
- The Doctor’s Office* by Gail Saunders-Smith. Mankato, MN: Capstone Publishers, 1998.
- Next! Please* by Christopher Inns. Berkley, CA: Tricycle Press, 2001.
- The Berenstain Bears Go to the Doctor* by Stan & Jan Berenstain. New York, NY: Random House, 1981.
- I’m Going to the Doctor* by Willabel L. Tong. New York, NY: Ladybird Books, a Division of Penguin USA, 1997.
- I’m Going to the Dentist* by Willabel L. Tong. New York, NY: Ladybird Books, a Division of Penguin USA, 1997.
- Going to the Dentist* by Fred Rogers. New York, NY: Putnam’s Sons, 1989.
- Going to the Dentist* (Usborne First Experiences) by Anne Civardi, 2010.
- Show Me Your Smile!: A Visit to the Dentist* (Dora the Explorer). New York, NY: Nickelodeon Publishing, 2013.
- Harry and the Dinosaurs say “Raahh!”* by Ian Whybrow. New York, NY: Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004.

Making Life Easier: **Going to the Doctor/Dentist**

★ **Prepare for the doctor/dentist visit.**

- **Schedule a time** that will work for your child.
- **Choose doctor/dentist** who has experience working with children with special needs.
- **Call ahead** to inform staff of child's special needs.
- **Visit the office** in advance.
- **Role play** the doctor/dentist visit
- Tell your child **what to expect.**
- **Pack a bag of favorite items** to take with you.
- Create a **personal story.**
- **Remain calm and positive** during the appointment.

★ **Inform staff** of helpful strategies.

★ **Use strategies** to decrease likelihood that behavior challenges will occur.

- Give **clear directions.**
- Use **"Wait time."**
- Provide **transition warnings.**
- Provide **limited choices.**
- Provide **frequent and specific praise** for acceptable behavior.
- **Empathize** with your child's feelings.
- Follow the appointment with an **activity your child enjoys.**
- **Encourage your child** to share his experiences.

★ **Celebrate** the successes along the way.