

Life Lessons While Shopping

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It is that time of year -- when shopping can have additional challenges with all the holiday items on display, crowds of people to contend with and lists that are longer than usual. You might be tempted to do anything possible to leave your children at home or with a friend or a sitter. After all, what can little kids learn when they are shopping with their parents in the store?

As it turns out, they can learn a great deal. To begin with, they learn about how to find the items in the store, what lives on each aisle. They can learn about quantity, quality and what's the best value. They can learn about how much you love hanging out with them in the store and how helpful they are to you. They can learn about not getting what they want right now--delayed gratification, self-control and how to entertain themselves when bored.

They can learn all this and more as long as they aren't watching a video on a phone or a tablet. Many parents of young children allow that. It's understandable. It makes it easier in the short term. However, I believe that what happens when they are young lays the foundation for what happens in your relationship with your child later in life. I believe in paying now... rather than paying much bigger later on.

So... the next time you're in the store, would it be healthier for the child to be helping you shop? How can you make that happen?

- Before you go, your child can help you draw pictures of a few of the items you need to find. Another option is to print images of these items off the web or have your child circle items in the weekly grocery store flyer. If your child can read and write, s/he can write down a list that you dictate or copy the one from the flyer. Now the child has something to hold in their hand as they help you on your mission.
- When they find something you need, they can feel great accomplished. If they spot something that's not right, you can say, "Oh, that's really close! That's almost what we want. Let's look over here. Oh, look at that. It looks just like our picture. Look, it says 'Beans.' The letter 'B' stands for beans."
- You can ask questions: "Are we going to get the small one for this price or the bigger one? I think we should get the bigger one. It's a better value. That means the price is just a little bigger, but the quantity is a lot bigger. 'Quantity' is just a fancy word for how much you get."
- If you have a child in middle school or high school, get their input on a new recipe to try out for dinner. Have them shop with you to get the ingredients and put the groceries away afterwards. Help them develop a specialty dish that they prepare (with your help as needed) for dinner. Consider having this be a weekly chore or contribution to the family.

These things make shopping so much more fun and think about the lessons learned with respect to vocabulary, math, and other essential life skills. Of course, they are not always going to be happy about this approach, particularly if they have become accustomed to watching videos or playing games while you are shopping.

That's okay because it is most important to give our children small opportunities to become unhappy or bored. Think about it--do these feelings still come our way as adults? The healthiest people are those who learned early in life that these feelings are temporary and that they can cope and get through them.