

SAFELY SHOPPING WITH CHILDREN

ASSUME SEPARATION IS INEVITABLE

Assuming the worst, allows planning. Plan by designating an agreed-upon meeting place. It is extremely important that your children know you will not leave the store without them, and they are not to leave without you. Teaching them to recognize store clerks and security officers as “safe strangers” can eliminate some of the fear of being lost.

Got a Wanderer?

- Have an action plan. Make sure your child knows what to do if he/she loses you. Tell them to stay where they are and call your name. If your child can't find you, they should know to alert a store employee. If he/she is very young, teach him to look for another "mommy" and ask for help.
- Don't panic. If your child wanders off, alert store personnel and security. They may have procedures in place to help you find them.

PRACTICE DIALING YOUR PHONE NUMBER

Teach your children your name and cell phone number (if age appropriate), OR write it on them; their hand, wrist or leg. Use liquid band-aid or clear nail polish to keep it from rubbing off. It is important to have them practice calling, too, not just reciting. This creates familiarity and is likely to ease hesitation when needed.

TAKE PHOTOS & WEAR DISTINCTIVE CLOTHING

Snap a photo before leaving the house to refer back to for details. Details will be hard to recall during the frenzy of being separated from your children.

Consider dressing them in bright clothing to make them easier to spot. While some frown upon it, a useful tool when shopping child is a child harness.

DON'T USE KID-FRIENDLY AREAS AS BABYSITTERS

Malls often have play areas, arcades, and video games. Do not allow your children to be unsupervised; kid-free shopping is not worth the risks. Instead, keep your child with you and occupied, reducing their boredom and instinct to wander off; use books, toys and other devices with the sound-off devices (the sound may keep them from being alert to their surroundings). Most importantly, ensure your children know that they cannot ever be out of your sight, which also means you cannot be out of theirs. If they want to go anywhere, they must always check with you first (and we still recommend everyone staying together or at least in pairs).

ALWAYS ACCOMPANY CHILDREN TO THE RESTROOM

Public restrooms pose vulnerability hazards. Accompany smaller children into public restrooms and stand outside the door for older (9+) kids. Communicate with your older child as they enter and let them know you'll be checking in if he/she takes too long. Not only will your child want to avoid the embarrassment of Mom or Dad checking in on them, but any predators will be warned that you're on the lookout and will want to avoid getting caught.

SHOPPING CARTS

Keep your child out of the basket. Buckle him/her into the fold-down seat of the cart making sure the safety belt works. A better option is to choose a cart with a child's seat.

- Never allow your child to ride on the side or back of the cart.
- Always stay within arm's reach of your child when shopping.

- As soon as your baby can sit up without support, they can ride in the seat of a shopping cart.
- Consider alternatives to placing your child in shopping carts: a stroller, wagon, baby carrier, or sling. Or, if able, allow your child to walk the aisles with you.

STORE DISPLAYS

Displays can be dangerous, including relatively small displays.

Do not allow your child to poke around displays and platforms. Not all stores secure their mannequins and displays; making them easy to topple over.

Discourage exploration. Crawling underneath a display or clothing rack may be a fun idea to your child but they could accidentally pull the whole thing down on top of them.

PARKING LOTS

Be just as careful in parking lots as you do inside your favorite stores. Not only watching out for cars and children toppling over in shopping carts but also predators. Avoid anyone approaching people in the parking lot and head directly for your vehicle. Keep your keys in your hands so that you're not fumbling for them and, if you feel unsafe for any reason, don't go it alone. Ask a security guard to accompany you and your family to your car, especially at night.

REMEMBER TO STAY SAFE AND HAVE FUN!



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