

## Learning on the Go In Public Places

Errands can equal education. Your everyday outing or errand — even if it's just **to the market** — can be a chance to connect with your child and to encourage his or her early learning.

### Connect

Going to the market is obviously a chore, especially at the end of a busy day. But markets also offer many opportunities for learning that can make the time there less trying.

### Watch and listen

Make sure that your child is not too hungry when you go to the market. Either take a snack or let your child pick an acceptable snack to eat. Then you and your child can focus on other things. Notice what your child is interested in to help make marketing a fun learning time together.

“There are so many ways that parents and caregivers can encourage language in young children and it's not through flash cards. It's through conversation, it's through questioning. The important thing is to invest words with meaning and once you do... those words live on forever.”

*Kathryn A. Hirsh-Pasek, PhD  
Professor of Psychology  
Director, Infant Language Laboratory  
Temple University*

### Extend

#### For your baby

- › The market is like a collage in motion — there is so much going on. Talk about the things you see as you shop.

#### For your toddler

- › Talk to your child in advance about a special thing that she or he can buy at the market. Then look for it, like a treasure hunt. This helps your child learn to be a good observer.
- › Ask your toddler about the shapes and colors he or she sees. Or, ask your toddler to name things that are up high or down low.
- › Give your toddler a cracker or piece of apple. Then point out the crackers and/or apples in the store.

#### For your preschooler

- › Take the adventure of looking for items you are going to purchase a step further. Cut out a picture of an item you are going to purchase and have your child match the picture with the real item on the store's shelf.
- › If there is conflict over what you are buying, set rules. For example: we will buy an item, but sugar can't be one of the first four ingredients. Or it can't have too many preservatives in the food. Have your child look at labels with you to see if this is something you can buy. All of these games can build pre-reading and thinking skills.

## Learning on the Go In Public Places

Parks and playgrounds are very active places for children. Discover ways to transform activity into learning while you're **at the park.**

### Connect

Being in the park can be a time that is restorative, both for you and for your child. It is also a time for you and your child to play and be physically active.

### Watch and listen

What does your child like about being in the park? Is it nature, looking at flowers, or watching the autumn leaves tumble to the ground? Is it the activities, the swings or jungle gyms? Is it other children? Is it all of the above?

“Stimulation to me means how you can provide rich opportunities that fit with your child — that your child will grab. If the stimulation is making opportunities available and the child takes the initiative, that’s great. But if stimulation is something that you *do* to a child, it generally is, probably at best, not going to be helpful and, at worse, potentially harmful.”

*Jack P. Shonkoff, MD  
Samuel F. and Rose B. Gingold Professor of  
Human Development and Social Policy  
Brandeis University*

### Extend

#### For your baby

- › Notice what delights your child at the park and give your child more of those experiences, whether it swinging on a baby swing, tossing piles of leaves or sitting in the sand box. Put words to these experiences or make up a song: “What did you do in the park today, dear little girl of mine? I saw another baby in the park today, mama dear mama of mine...”

#### For your toddler

- › Talk about what your child wants to do at the park and then make a point of doing that. Then talk about what you did on the way home. This helps your child begin to make choices and plan ahead.
- › Let your child collect little rocks, leaves or other natural things that fascinate him or her. Sorting helps your child learn to form categories, by seeing the differences and similarities between objects. Bring along containers for scooping and pouring sand.

#### For your preschooler

- › Make plans to meet other friends at the park and discuss those plans in advance. Do you want to meet at the swings or at the climber?
- › If your child likes flowers, talk about their colors and sizes, count them, or ask questions about all the things you could make with them. Or stop to watch a bug or a dog and talk about what you saw later.

## Learning on the Go In Public Places

**Libraries** are full of learning, and are wonderful for exploring language and books. Here are some helpful tips for library-going.

### Connect

The library, especially if it has a section set up for young children, can provide a wonderful space to be together and enjoy the world of language and books. Many libraries offer story times for children of different ages, or have play areas with toys, puzzles and soft pillows or couches.

### Watch and listen

What does your child like best when you go to the library? Is it looking at books or story hour? Is it climbing the steps to get into the building? Notice what interests your child and encourage him or her to do more.

### Extend

#### For your baby

- › It is never too early to introduce your child to books. Babies like books made from cloth or heavy paper with pictures of other babies, of everyday objects or animals. Hold baby on your lap and let him or her “look at” books. Name things that are in the books and show your baby the real life object, such as the “nose” in a picture and the nose on your face.
- › Borrow books that your child enjoys or seems interested in and read them together at home again and again.

#### For your toddler

- › Let your child help choose books that interest him or her, even if your child chooses the same books. Repeating a known story gives your child a sense of mastery.
- › Have your child “read” by telling you a favorite story or repeating words or phrases in the story, such as “Ten Apples on Top” or “Goodnight Moon.”

#### For your preschooler

- › Think about what your child loves to watch and do. Then borrow books that you think your child will be interested in. Keep looking for books that extend this interest.
- › Let your preschooler choose books to borrow. Looking forward to reading a story your child chose will increase your child’s love of books and reading.

“Children learn language in a situation where they talk to you about what they are interested in and you respond.”

*Catherine E. Snow, PhD  
Henry Lee Shatluck, Professor of Education  
Graduate School of Education, Harvard University*

*Born Learning*<sup>SM</sup> is a public engagement campaign helping parents, caregivers and communities create early learning opportunities for young children. Designed to support you in your critical role as a child’s first teacher, *Born Learning* educational materials are made available through the efforts of United Way, United Way Success By 6 and Civitas. For more information, visit us online at [www.bornlearning.org](http://www.bornlearning.org).

Civitas thanks **Parents as Teachers**, an international early childhood parent education and family support program, for their ongoing support.

