

# Skill-Building Opportunities

## A Case of the “Gimmes”

**Question:** My child has a bad case of the “Gimmes.” Whenever we go to a store, she asks for everything she sees. I try not to buy something every time we go out, but when I don’t, she throws a tantrum in public, and it’s embarrassing. I don’t want my child to be spoiled. How can I help her understand that she can’t always have what she wants?

Well, we’ve all been there, thinking we’ll just die if we don’t have that jacket, those shoes, that doll. Truth is, we’ll be fine without 95% of it. Also, there are many things you can do to help your child understand the difference between her needs and her wants by promoting the life skill of Making Connections.

**Making Connections** is at the heart of learning—figuring out what’s the same and what’s different—and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can “Google” information, people who can see connections are able to go beyond knowing information to using this information well.

1

### Give your child a sense of control.

**Encourage her to think of ideas to help manage.** Say something like: “Every time we go to the store, you ask me to buy you something. I can’t spend money on things we don’t need, so what ideas do you have to help you manage when we are in the store?”

Have your child think of as many ideas as possible, then talk with her about what will work and what won’t work about each idea. Select one of her suggestions to try. If it works, continue to use it, and, if it doesn’t, go through this problem-solving process again.

By using this process, you help your child learn to differentiate between needs and wants. Parents find that giving into wants (not needs) of kids encourage them to become what’s called “spoiled”—meaning that the more demands, the more you give in, the more the child will seem to want. In contrast, problem-solving helps your child learn to manage her emotions.

Offer some suggestions:

- Ask her bring a toy from home or something to read or draw with to keep her hands and mind busy while you shop.
- Invite your child to shop for what the family needs by having her help make the grocery list. She can draw, cut out pictures, and/or use letters and words of things to look for in the store. Making lists provides a useful task and helps build the foundation for early reading and writing.

2

**Make it fun.**

Involve your child in the shopping process and make it fun. Children learn best when they're engaged in playful ways with important people in their everyday lives. Playing games helps her focus on something other than asking for things, making the experience more enjoyable for both of you!

- Play “I Spy” as you walk through the store. Encourage her to find items by describing their color or shape like: “I Spy a vegetable that is orange and pointy. That’s right, it’s a carrot!” Make sure to give her a chance to ask you to find things.
- Invite her to point to the different letters and numbers she sees in the store,: “Can you find the number 9 on a sign?”

3

**Be a smart shopping example.**

Although your child doesn't fully understand the value of money, she can begin to learn, through your example, that it's important to think about what you're buying, and that some things are more important than others.

- Talk with your child about what you're buying and why: “First, we will pay for the apples we need and then, if we have money left over, we can pick up a treat for dessert.”

4

**Use “math talk” while shopping.**

Susan Levine of the University of Chicago emphasizes the importance of using the “language of mathematics” with your child: talking about number and quantity in a variety of ways.

- Build on your child's early number sense. When you use words like “more,” “less,” “bigger” and “smaller” and let your child experience what these words mean in her everyday life, you help her make connections between numbers and her experiences: “Look, here are two different cans of the same soup. This one is more money, and this one costs less. We need to buy the one that costs less.”