

REACH Returning to Education
and Continued Healing



Going Out in Public

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caretakers*

*NOTE: The word "Parent" will be used throughout this module, but includes all of the above



Going Out in Public

- Going out in public after a burn injury means having to deal with the reactions of others to your child's different appearance
- For some children this will not be difficult. Others may have concerns.
- Your child will learn how to deal with the reactions of others based on how you respond (what you do and say)



How do you deal with people's reactions?

1. Prepare yourself and your child
2. Plan responses for questions and reactions
3. Practice in easy and familiar situations
4. Discuss experiences
5. Look after yourself as well as your child



#1 Prepare Yourself

- Accept that you might have strong feelings about your child going out in public or into new situations
- Identify what worries you have, and what you might do to address these concerns
- Review resources section for suggestions on dealing with this issue
- Seek help from friends, family, or health care team



#1 Prepare Your Child

- Discuss with your child their thoughts and feelings about going out in public
- Identify concerns or questions your child might have
- Offer support, reassurance, and suggestions on things to do or say

#1 Prepare Your Child

- Your child will learn how to deal with the reactions of others based on what you say and do. Model words and behaviors:
 - Greet others with confidence
 - Speak in a friendly and assertive manner
 - Include your child in conversations when appropriate. Encourage them to lead conversations as they get older.
 - Focus on positive interactions and responses
 - Praise your child when they positively respond to new situations

#2 Plan Responses

- Encourage your child to anticipate questions and develop simple responses
- Have a brief explanation ready for typical questions that might be asked
- Provide reassurance to concerned others that you and your child are okay
- Prepare and use “small talk” to distract and redirect the conversation



#2 Plan Responses: Potential Situations

- What places would you like to visit when you get home? (Suggest several options.) Who should go with you?
- I bet your friends will wonder what has happened to you. What shall we tell them?
- Your teacher knows you were burned. She will be interested to know that you have a skin graft on your hand.
- Would you like to visit school to meet with your teacher before going back to classes?



#2 Plan Responses: Potential Situations

- What kind of questions do you think people might ask you about your injury and hospital stay?
- What kind of reaction do you think you will get from other children or strangers?
- Children are curious when they see something different. Sometimes they stare. We will let them know that you were burned, but it is okay for you to play with them.
- Adults sometimes ask a lot of questions. It is okay for you to say “I don’t want to talk about it right now.”



#3 Practice

- Have your child practice responses they might make in a variety of situations
- Trips to the cafeteria and public areas at the hospital can be great places to start practicing
- Try out responses with hospital staff or visiting friends
- Take your child to familiar public places to practice:
 - Plan your first outing by identifying familiar or favorite places your child wants to visit (store, park, etc.)
 - Bring along family and friends for support



#4 Discuss Experiences

- After a public outing or encounter, talk with your child about how it went:
 - I liked how you responded...
 - That seemed to go well when you...
 - I thought that lady looked sad when she looked at your hand...
 - I liked how you focused on what you can do....



#4 Discuss Experiences

- Was that difficult when...
- You seemed uncomfortable when....
- Did that upset you
- Did you mind that I said....
- Is there something you would like to do or say differently next time?
- Is there something you would like me to do or say differently next time?



#5 Look After Yourself!

- You can best help your child by being calm, relaxed, and reassuring
- Remember: take time to do fun things, relax, and enjoy being with your family and friends
- Practice positive self-talk:
 - I will be okay
 - Our family has dealt with hard things before and we will get through this too



Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

- Put dressings, pressure garments, or splints on a doll or stuffed animal and use it to act out situations that your child might encounter
- Read a children's story about a child who is reluctant to go out in public, and talk about it with your child
- Use the coloring book "Getting Burned, Getting Better, Going Home" to talk with your child



Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old

- Identify groups that your child feels more comfortable visiting to practice responses (play group, scouts, youth or church group, school clubs, sports team, etc.)
- Look for scenes in TV shows or movies to discuss a character that was shy or afraid to go out in public. Talk about how the character handled it, and what could have been done differently.



Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old

- Encourage your child to keep in touch with friends while out of school so they will have support during future public outings
- Ask your child to name a student who they think is shy or uncomfortable in groups. Ask your child what advice they would give to that student to help them overcome their fear.



Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old

- Identify groups that your child feels more comfortable visiting to practice responses (group of friends going shopping, school clubs, sports team, youth group, etc.)
- Request a visit from a SOAR Volunteer and talk with the volunteer about specific concerns or questions that your child has



Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- Invite family or friends to visit and go into public places of the hospital. Include these same individuals for visits in the home community, school, or work environment.
- If your young adult works outside of the home, practice what types of scenarios they might encounter with others
- Encourage a visit with a SOAR volunteer

