

TIME-OUT

WHAT IS TIME-OUT?

Time-out means time-out from reinforcement, rewards and attention. This includes both positive (playing with or talking to) and negative (yelling) kinds of attention. It involves quickly removing your child from the reinforcing or pleasurable situation in which his misbehavior occurs and briefly placing him in a quiet and boring area where he cannot find anything amusing or stimulating to do.

Time-out has two goals, an immediate one and a long-term one. The immediate goal is to bring an abrupt stop to the problem behavior. The long-term goal of *time-out* is to help your child to achieve self-control and self-discipline. By being removed from the situation, the child learns that if he wants to be around others he must learn to control his behavior. *Time-out* has an added bonus: it allows parents to take a few minutes in a high stress situation, away from their child, to get control over their own emotions and handle the problem calmly and confidently.

WHY USE TIME OUT?

There are many advantages of using *time-out*. Probably the most important one is that *time-out* is immediate and brief. It allows the parent to stop a problematic behavior, to deliver a consequence that is discouraging, and to terminate the punishment in a few minutes. Punishment is not effective if children do not have a chance to make up for wrong behavior *within a reasonable amount of time*. For example, if three-year-old Alex rides his bicycle into the street, and as a result, you tell him he cannot ride it for two weeks, by the time his punishment is up, Alex will most likely have forgotten he ever *had* a bicycle!

Other advantages of using the *time-out* method include:

- *Time-out* is easy for parents to learn and use
- *Time-out* quickly weakens many bad behaviors
- *Time-out* It is an effective method that can teach your child what they must *not* do
- *Time-out* takes the burden of punishment off of the parent, as both parent and child are aware of what behaviors will result in time-out
- Parents report feeling less angry and upset when using this method of discipline
- Parents are a rational and non-aggressive “model” for their kids
- The parent-child relationship quickly returns to normal following the use of *time-out*

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO GET STARTED

Purchase a portable kitchen timer. You can find this at Target or K-Mart in several designer colors to match your decor. When asked to buy a timer, many parents say “I use the timer on my microwave.” You definitely want to avoid this!

First of all, the child should be able to see the timer from *time-out*, and the kitchen is usually not the best place for *time-out* as there are often other people present. Secondly, one important goal of *time-out* is teaching your child responsibility for his own behavior. If the timer is in another room, then you the parent will have to play “time monitor” which then takes away the responsibility from your child.

Pick a boring place. An ideal spot for *time-out* is a dull place or room where your child doesn’t receive any attention from you or other family members. Your child should be able to get there quickly, preferably within ten seconds. It needs to be a dull place without access to or a view of any toys, television or other people. For children between the ages of two and five, many people use a *time-out* chair located in a hallway or corner of a room not constantly used like a dining or living room. The *time-out* place should be safe, well lit and not frightening. The purpose of *time-out* is not to frighten a child, but to bore him.

Your child’s crib or bedroom may seem the most “convenient” place for *time-out* however the effectiveness of *time-out* will be greatly reduced if you choose this as the place. Your child’s bedroom usually has toys, games, a radio or books. It is far from dull and boring. More importantly, your child’s bedroom, particularly his crib, should be a place that he associates with safety, positive feelings, and sleep. Placing your child in his crib when he is misbehaving associates it with a “punishment” and he may later confuse other times he is put in his crib (e.g., nap time or bedtime) with negative feelings. Used frequently, some children might develop difficulties being put down to sleep.

In addition, many children who are put in their crib or room for *time-out* end up crying and falling asleep. When they do wake up they have forgotten they were even in *time-out*, hardly allowing for an opportunity to learn how to behave more appropriately!

Select a target behavior. *Time-out* is effective in eliminating misbehaviors, which are impulsive, aggressive, emotional or hostile. The following is a list of behaviors that are **appropriate for using time-out**:

- à hitting
- à temper tantrums
- à hostile teasing of other children; provoking others
- à back talk to parents and other adults
- à angry screaming and yelling
- à grabbing a toy from another child
- à throwing or destroying toys
- à biting or threatening to bite
- à kicking, hair pulling, choking, slapping, pinching, scratching, or pushing others
- à spitting or threatening to spit at others
- à throwing rocks, dirt or sticks at others
- à mistreating or hurting pets and other animals
- à doing dangerous things like riding bicycle into street
- à threatening to hurt or hit others through word or gestures
- à cursing and swearing
- à food throwing at the table
- à Purposefully damaging furniture or the house
- à name calling and “making faces” at others

The following is a list of behaviors for which **time-out is *not* appropriate**:

- à pouting, sulking
- à irritableness, bad mood, grumpy
- à failing or forgetting to do chores
- à not picking up toys or clothes
- à not doing homework or practicing piano
- à overactive behavior
- à fearfulness
- à being dependent, timid or passive
- à wanting to be alone
- à behaviors *not* observed by the parent

You and your partner should discuss which behaviors you consider problematic and would like to see changed. To begin with, choose one behavior, preferably one that is minor and occurs *at least* one or two times a day. This will allow you and your child to get familiar with *time-out* before tackling more problematic behaviors. The key to starting off is success! You *want* your child to have to go to *time-out* so that he learns how to use it. Avoid trying to use *time-out* for all of your child’s unacceptable behaviors or he might spend most of the day in *time-out*! After you see success in decreasing the first target behavior you selected, you can add another behavior to be monitored. Once you gain experience in using *time-out*, move on to a major target behavior such as hitting or temper tantrums. These behaviors are more challenging because children tend to be more emotional or angry when engaging in these behaviors.

Before using *time-out* it is a good idea to count and record how often the target behavior occurs. This will allow you to see the progress you and your child are making after beginning *time-out*. You may think it is a hassle to keep a record of these behaviors but it will show you how effective you have been at reducing your child’s misbehavior.

Explain time-out to your child. Once you have chosen a target behavior, your next step is to explain *time-out* to your child. Introduce *time-out* when both you and your child are relaxed, not when a problematic behavior has occurred. Your child needs to know that you expect him to follow the rules (e.g. no hitting) and that to help him you are going to use *time-out*.

For example: Travis is three years old. When his little brother touches his toys, he gets angry and sometimes hits him. Mom, Dad and Travis are sitting in the kitchen.

Mom: *Travis, Daddy and I both love you and we want everyone to be happy.*

Remember yesterday when Blake took your duplos, you got mad and hit him?

Well the rule in our family is no hitting.

Travis: *Can I watch Sesame Street?*

Dad: *Yes, in a couple of minutes. But right now we want to talk about hitting and how to help you stop hitting your brother. If you hit him you will have to sit on the time-out chair, and you can’t get off until this timer rings. When this timer rings you may get off the chair.*

Travis: *Can I watch Sesame Street now?*

Mom: *In a minute. Let me show you what happens when you hit. (Mom picks him up and puts him in the time-out chair). When mommy puts you here, you have to stay here until this timer rings like this (makes it ring). You may sit or kneel but you can’t stand up or get down off the chair until the timer rings. (makes it ring). Did you hear that? Now you can get down. That is called time-out.*

Travis: *Can I watch my show now?*

Mom: *Yes. But remember, if you hit your brother, you will be put in time-out and you will have to stay there until the timer rings.*

Obviously, Travis wasn’t paying too close attention to his parent’s introduction of *time-out*. Travis’ parents will explain and demonstrate it two more times before actually using it.

BASIC STEPS FOR INITIALLY USING TIME-OUT

1. Pick a target behavior and wait patiently for it to occur. *Make sure your child is aware of the rules, as well as what misbehaviors will land him in *time-out*. When children don’t know the rules, they don’t understand why they are being put in *time-out* and they don’t learn what is expected of them.
2. Send or place your child in *time-out* using no more than *ten words* and *ten seconds*. For example, Travis is caught hitting his brother. Mom says, *Travis, we don’t hit, go to time-out*. Or, *Travis, time-out for hitting*. Initially your child may not go willingly. Pick him up, facing away from you and carry him to time-out. Do not talk to him or make eye contact. If necessary, hold him in the chair from behind, ignoring his *promises not to do it again* and his *cries to be released*. Don’t feel bad when he calls you a “mean mommy” or a “bad daddy.” He will forget he said it sooner than you will.
3. Set the portable timer, in view but out of reach of your child. The rule of thumb is *one minute per year of age, up to five minutes*. Travis, being three years old, would be in *time-out* for three minutes.
4. Ignore your child while in *time-out*. Have the family go about their business. Children hate to feel left out of the action! If your child continues to cry or yell when the timer rings, reset the clock for 2 minutes (one minute for the under three crowd). If he is quiet when the timer goes off he may get up.

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