

USING TIME-OUT FOR BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Guidelines for Parents

Time-out involves placing your child on a chair for a short period of time following the occurrence of an unacceptable behavior. This procedure has been effective in reducing problem behaviors such as tantrums, hitting, biting, failure to follow directions, leaving the yard without permission and others. Parents have found that time-out works better than spanking, yelling, or threatening your children. It is most appropriate for children from 18 months through 10 years.

Preparations

1. You should purchase a small portable kitchen timer.
2. A place for time-out should be selected. This could be a chair in the hallway, kitchen, or corner of a room. It needs to be a dull place (not your child's bedroom) where your child cannot view the TV or play with toys. It should NOT be a dark, scary, or dangerous place. The aim is to remove your child to a place where not much is happening, not to make your child afraid.
3. You should discuss with your spouse which behaviors will result in time-out. Consistency is very important.

Practicing

1. Before using time-out for discipline, you should practice using it with your child at a pleasant time.
2. Tell your child there are two rules when in time-out:
 - Rule 1: The timer will start when he is quiet. Ask your child what would happen if he talks or makes noises when in time-out. Your child should say the timer will be reset or something similar. If he does not say this, remind him of the rule.
 - Rule 2: If he gets off the chair before the timer rings, you will replace him in the chair. If necessary you may hold the child if he/she is out of control--avoid looking at the child at these times or doing anything he/she would construe as physical affection.
3. After explaining the rules and checking out your child's understanding of the rules, go through the steps under "C". Tell your child you are "pretending" this time.
4. Mention to your child that you will be using this technique instead of spanking, yelling, or threatening. Most kids are pleased to learn this.

Procedure

- Step 1: Following an inappropriate behavior, say to the child, "Oh, you... (describe what the child did)." For example, "You hit your sister. Go to the time-out please." Say this calmly and only once. It is important not to lose your temper or begin nagging. If your child has problems getting to the chair quickly, guide him with as little effort as needed. This can range from leading the child part way by the hand or carrying the child to the chair. If you have to carry your child to the chair, be sure to hold him/her facing away from you so he/she doesn't confuse a hug with a trip to time-out.
- Step 2: When your child is on the chair and quiet, set the timer to a specific number of minutes. The rule of thumb is one minute for each year of age up to five minutes. A two-year-old would have two minutes; a three-year-old, three minutes; a five-year-old, five minutes. For child five years and above, five minutes is the maximum amount of time. If your child makes noises, screams or cries, reset the timer. Do this each time the child makes noises. If your child gets off the chair before the time is up, replace the child on the chair, and reset the timer. Do this each time the child gets off the chair.
- Step 3: After your child has been quiet and seated for the required amount of time, the timer will ring. Go to the time-out chair and ask your child if he would like to get up. Do not speak from across the room. A nod of the head or a positive or neutral answer is required. Answering in an angry tone of voice or refusing to answer is not acceptable. If your child is still mad, he will probably get into trouble again in a short period of time. Should your child answer in an angry tone or refuse to answer, reset the timer. Your child may then answer appropriately, but once the timer is reset it must go to the full amount of time. You are the one who should decide when your child gets off the time-out chair, not the child.
- Step 4: After your child finishes a time-out period, he should start with a "clean slate." It is not necessary to discuss, remind, or nag about what the child did wrong. Within five minute after time-out, look for and praise good

behavior. It would be wise to take your child to a different part of the house and start in a new activity. Remember, catch 'em being good.

Summary of the Rules:

For Parent:

- Decide what behaviors you will use time-out for ahead of time. Discuss these with your child.
- Don't leave your child in time-out and forget about him/her.
- Don't nag, scold or talk to your child when he is in timeout. All family members should follow this rule!
- Remain calm, particularly when your child is being testy.

For Children:

- Go immediately to time-out when you're asked to. Don't argue.
- Remain quiet and stay on the time-out chair until your asked to get down. You'll spend less time that way.
- The timer is not to be touched by any child in the house. If you do touch it, you will be placed in time-out.

For Brothers and Sisters:

- If you tease, laugh at or talk with your brother or sister while they are in time-out, you will be placed on the chair and your brother or sister will get down.

Things to Check When Time-Out Doesn't Work

1. Be sure you are not warning your child one (or more) times before sending him/her to the time-out chair. Warnings only teach your child that he/she can misbehave at least once (or more) before you'll use time-out. Warnings only make things worse, not better.
2. All adults who are responsible for disciplining your child at home should be using the time-out chair. You should agree when and for what behaviors to send your child to time-out. (You will want new sitters, visiting friends, and relatives to read and discuss the time-out guidelines.)
3. In order to maximize the effectiveness of time-out, you must make the rest of the day ("time-in") pleasant for your child. Remember to let your child know when she/he is well behaved ("catch 'em being good") rather than taking good behavior for granted. Most children would prefer to have you put them in time-out than ignore them completely.
4. Your child may say "Going to the chair doesn't bother me," or "I like time-out." Don't fall for this trick. Many children try to convince their parents that time-out is fun and, therefore, not working. You should notice over time that the problem behaviors for which you use time-out occur less often. (Time-out is not supposed to be a miserable experience.)
5. When you first begin using time-out, your child may act like timeout is a "game." She/He may put him/herself in time-out or ask to go to time-out. If this happens, give your child what she/he wants-that is, put him/her in time-out and require your child to sit quietly for the required amount of time. Your child will soon learn that time-out is not a game. Your child may also laugh or giggle when being placed in time-out or while in time-out. Although this may aggravate you, it is important for you to completely ignore your child when she/he is in time-out.
6. You may feel the need to punish your child for doing something inappropriate in the chair (e.g., cursing, spitting). However, it is very important to ignore your child when she/he behaves badly in time-out. This will teach your child that such "attention-getting" strategies will NOT work. If your child curses when out of the chair (and it bothers you), be sure to put the child in time-out.
7. TV, radio, or a nice view out the window can make time-out more tolerable and prolong the length of time your child must stay in the chair by encouraging him/her to talk. Try to minimize such distractions.
8. You must use time-out for major as well as minor behavior problems. Parents have a tendency to feel that time-out is not enough of a punishment for big things and thereby discipline inconsistently. Consistency is most important for time-out to work for big and small problems.