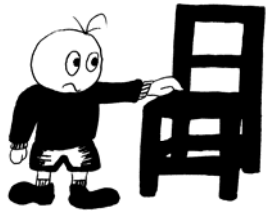


# ***TIME-OUT AS A DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUE***



Time-out is a discipline technique that involves placing children in a very boring place for several minutes following unacceptable behaviors. Time-out really means **time out from any attention**. Many parents have found time-out to be more effective in improving their children's behavior than hitting, yelling, and threatening. It has been shown to be effective in decreasing various problem behaviors (e.g., temper tantrums, not minding, hitting, etc.). Some parents say they have tried time-out before, and it did not work. In most cases, the reason it failed was because time-out was not used correctly. It is critical that the time-out procedure be followed exactly as stated. It can take only one slight change in the procedure to turn it from being very effective to being ineffective. Consistency in using the time-out procedure is

critical. Parents should make sure that all other adults who discipline their children use the same technique.

The time-out procedure described in this handout is generally most appropriate for children from about 18 months to 10 years of age.

## **For What Behaviors Should Time-Out Be Used?**

There are three categories of problems for which time-out should be used:

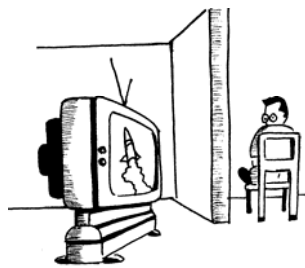
**\*Children should be placed in time-out for not following parental directions.** If children do not start to follow a direction within five seconds, time-out should be used. Parents should never give directions they are not prepared to enforce. Parents should also never give more than **one** warning before using time-out. Children can learn that their parents mean business after one warning just as easily as they learn that they have about five warnings before their parents really mean business. However, only having to issue one warning results in a lot less frustration and fewer lost tempers!

**\*Children should be placed in time-out for unacceptable behaviors.**

Children should also be placed in time-out for any behaviors that parents decide are unacceptable (e.g., temper tantrums, hitting, biting, breaking a house rule). **Consistency is very important**, so it will be necessary for parents to decide in advance for what behaviors they agree to use time-out. When parents first start to use time-out, it may be best to focus on one or two problem behaviors. As those behaviors improve, parents can add to the list of behaviors for which they will use time-out. Children should be placed in time-out **every** time the unacceptable behavior occurs.

**\*Children should be placed in time-out for dangerous behaviors.** Time-out should be used when children do something dangerous or potentially dangerous.

### Choosing A Location For Time-Out



When parents first start to use time-out, it is best to have one or two places in the home for time-out.

The following guidelines should be used in selecting a time-out location.

**\*Choose a place away from toys, people, T.V.'s, radios, windows, and anything else entertaining.**

**\*There should be no breakable objects nearby.**

**\*It is best to have children sit in a chair during time-out.** The chair should be a straight-back kitchen-type chair rather than a comfortable lounge or valuable piece of furniture. Full-size chairs are preferable to child-size chairs. Full-size chairs make it easier to determine when children are on or off the chair.

**\*Children's bedrooms are typically not good places for time-out.** Children's bedrooms often contain many items to entertain them.

**\*The best place is often a chair in a hallway, kitchen, or corner of the room.**

**\*If a separate room is used, do not turn off the lights.** This will only scare children. Also, do not use a closet. The purpose of time-out is to remove children from attention, not to scare them.

## **Preparing Children For Time-Out**

Before using time-out for discipline, parents should briefly explain the procedure to their children at a level they can understand. Parents should tell their children that they are going to use time-out for discipline instead of spanking, yelling, and threatening (or whatever techniques are presently used). Parents should also tell their children what behaviors will result in time-out. It helps to have children repeat the steps back. Children should be told that there are two rules that they need to know about time-out:

**\*Children need to be quiet in time-out.** Parents should tell their children that time-out will not start until they are quiet. Parents should tell their children that the time will start over if they talk or make noises.

**\*Children must stay in the chair until they are told to get off the chair.** Parents should tell their children that if they get off the chair before being told, the time will start over.

Young children cannot be expected to remember the rules just because parents told them. They will need to learn the rules by experiencing what happens when they talk during

time-out or when they get off the chair without permission. Even older children who know the rules will not follow them unless parents enforce them. (Would you always resist speeding if you knew the police were not enforcing the speed limit?) After explaining time-out, parents and children should practice. Parents should tell their children that they are going to pretend that a rule has been broken. Parents should then lead their children through the procedure. Parents should praise their children after the practice for learning the procedure.

## **Sending Children To Time-Out**

**Immediately** after an unacceptable behavior occurs, parents should tell their children "Because you \_\_\_\_\_(whatever they did), you have to go to time-out." Parents should say this only once. They should say it in a calm but firm voice. Parents should never use more than one sentence in telling their children to go to time-out. Also, parents should send their children to time-out as soon as their children's behavior starts becoming unacceptable. Parents shouldn't wait until their children have a full-blown temper tantrum. It is important that parents not yell or nag. Parents

should be as matter-of-fact as possible.

- \* **Remain calm.**
- \* **Do not lecture, scold, or argue.**
- \* **Do not accept any excuses.**
- \* **Do not talk to children on the way to the chair.** After telling their children to go to time-out, parents should not say anything to their children until the time-out is over.
- \* **If children do not go to time-out immediately, parents should use a little physical guidance (e.g., take your children's hands and lead them to the chair).** If children resist, parents should pick their children up (facing away from them) and carry them to the chair.
- \* **Ignore.** Parents should ignore shouting, protesting, and promises to be good.

### **What To Do While Children Are In Time-Out**



When parents first start using time-out many children scream or cry. This is normal, and parents should just ignore it. This should stop before too long. It is critical for everyone to ignore children who are in time-out. Siblings should be placed in time-out if they bother a brother or sister in time-out. No one should talk to or maintain eye contact with children in time-out. All protests and fussing should be ignored. Many children say things such as "I like sitting here." Just ignore this. (They are just trying to bother their parents.) While children are in time-out, parents should try to go about their normal activities. They should not just stand around waiting for the time to be up. Children need to see that other family members are not bothered by time-outs.

It is recommended that parents use a portable kitchen timer to keep track of time-outs. When children are in the chair and are quiet, parents should start the timer for the specified number of minutes. As a general rule, it is recommended that time-outs last one minute for each year of age up to a maximum of five minutes. These times represent quiet periods. If children start talking or making attention-seeking noises, the timer should be reset.

Parents should not lecture or remind their children of the quiet rule. They will get the message by seeing their parents reset the timer. The timer may need to be reset several times before children are quiet for the whole specified time. Parents should never let their children out of time-out while they are talking, yelling, or crying.

If children get off the chair before the time is up, their parents should immediately say "NO" in a stern voice and put their children back on the chair. Then, they should reset the timer. Parents should not start talking to their children. Parents should do this every time their children get off the chair. If children get back on the chair as their parents approach, parents should just reset the timer. If parents follow this procedure carefully, it should not be more than a few days before children consistently remain on the chair. If children continue to get off the chair, parents should consult their children's health care provider.

### **What To Do When The Time-Out Period Is Over**

After children have been quiet and seated for the specified time, the timer will sound. This is not a signal

for children to hop out of the chair. Parents are the ones who determine if their children are ready to get off the chair. When the timer goes off, parents should go over and ask their children if they are ready to get off the chair. If the answer is affirmative, parents should tell their children the time-out is over. If the answer is negative (or children are obviously still angry), parents should just walk away and reset the timer. Parents should not lecture or nag their children about why they went to time-out.

If children were sent to time-out for not following directions (e.g., did not put their toys away after being told), parents should give the same direction to their children as soon as the time-out is over. If the children follow the direction this time, parents should say something to the effect of, "I like it when you do as you are told." If the children do not follow the direction, parents should repeat the time-out procedure. It might take several times before children learn that parents mean what they say.

Shortly after a time-out, it is important for parents to look for and to praise their children's appropriate behavior. Remember,

parents should catch their children being good.

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### **Using Time-Out Outside The Home**

It is recommended that parents use time-out only in the home until both parents and their children learn the procedure. When children consistently take time-outs with little fussing, parents can start using it outside of the home. In places where chairs are not available, parents can use substitutes such as standing in a corner, sitting on a step, or standing on a specific floor tile. Remember, parents should **never** leave their children unattended in public places.

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### **Time-In**

The most critical component of making time-out work is what happens when children are not misbehaving. It is very important that parents do not take their children's appropriate behavior for granted. Parents should let their children know through praise and physical affection that they notice appropriate behavior.

**CATCH YOUR CHILDREN BEING GOOD!!!**

