

Time Out!



It's been around since dunce caps and corners. With a modern twist, Time Out can be a valuable discipline tool.

As we go about the business of teaching our children proper behavior, there are times when emotions threaten to get out of control. When this happens, it's wise to separate yourself from your child so that you can both cool off. *Time Out* can be used as an effective, positive tool. There are three different ways to use *Time Out*, each having a different purpose.

1. To give the child the time and space to cool off and calm down.

The key here is in the attitude of the parent. In advance, let your child know that when her behavior is out of control she'll be asked to go to her room. Tell her that when she is calm and under control she may join the family. How she chooses to use the time is her business, as long as it's respectful of people and property. Screaming or pounding the door is not acceptable, reading a book or other activities is fine. This is a valuable life skill that will prevent your child from "*flying off the handle*" and saying and doing things she might regret later. Never drag a child to his *Time Out*. This

robs you of the upper hand and makes you look foolish. Let him know in advance that when asked to remove himself he needs to do so immediately. If he does not, he'll be choosing to give up a privilege [one you have specified in advance], in addition to *Time Out*.

2. To give a parent the time and space to cool off and calm down

There are times when we get so angry at our children that we want to scream, hit or ground them for life! This is the time to use a four-letter-word: EXIT. Make a brief statement, "*I'm so angry, I need a minute to think.*" Then go to your room or send the child to his room so that you can calm down and regroup. This will help you get yourself under control, and it provides good modeling for your children.

3. As a method for stopping a specific misbehavior

This can be an excellent way to put an immediate stop to a child's action. It brings a strong message, "*This behavior is unacceptable and it will stop now.*" There are several keys:

- **Be quick.** Catch your child in the act. Delayed reactions dilute the effect.
- **Use selectively.** Use for hitting, talking back, and whining or other specific problems. Don't over-use.
- **Keep calm.** Your anger only adds fuel to the fire and changes the focus from the behavior of the child to your anger. This prevents you from being in control.
- **Stick with it.** Once you say "*Time Out*" don't back down or be talked out of it. If you decide to use *Time Out* to control hitting, for example, use it every time your child hits, even if he spends most of the day in *Time Out*! Eventually, he'll decide that it's more fun to play without hitting than to sit alone in his room.

Time Out is one more effective discipline tool for parents. When used with other positive parenting methods, it helps you feel good about the job you are doing with your kids.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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