

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

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Behaviour Management - Time Out

REMEMBER:

- *Stay calm. Take a breath.*
- *Get your child's full attention before giving instructions.*
- *Speak in a neutral voice.*
- *Be firm but kind with your instructions.*
- *Follow through on what you say.*
- *Be consistent and persistent.*
- *Don't talk too much.*
- *Keep time-out spaces neutral and boring.*
- *Don't engage with your child when they are in time out.*
- *Give praise and attention for good behaviour, rather than misbehaviour.*

Proudly managed by



Most parents will have heard of the behaviour management strategy known as Time Out.

What is it?

Time Out is a tried and tested discipline technique that helps children to control their behaviour. The basic idea behind this strategy is to help teach children self-regulation, or how to manage their feelings and behaviour. With younger children time-out is a good opportunity to calm down and regroup.

“Time Out” is time away from interaction with other people and forms of stimulation which may make it difficult for the child to manage how they are feeling and behaving. It also gives parents a chance to calm down, have breathing space, and gather thoughts about how to respond next. As misbehaviour generally involves a lot of emotion, both on the part of the child and the parent, time-out can de-escalate a situation before things get out of hand.

Different variations of this approach have sprung up in a range of parenting programs and reality television shows; it has almost become a household name! Some people use a “naughty chair”, whilst others simply send children to their rooms. Wherever the Time Out space is, it should be safe and neutral; time-out is not meant to be fun or exciting.

Many parents have tried this technique with varying degrees of success. If you have tried Time Out before and it has not worked, this does not mean that either you or the method has failed. Success is often a matter of fine-tuning use of the techniques, and above all being consistent and persistent.

This method is also a consequence for behaviour (see our information sheet on Consequences for more information). It should generally be used after other behaviour management techniques have failed, or for serious discipline issues.

DO

- Stay calm.
- Be firm but kind.
- Use a neutral tone of voice.
- Get your child's attention – don't yell from across the room.
- Use clear and specific instructions. For example, "stop jumping on the couch" rather than "stop being naughty".
- Mean what you say and follow through.
- Be consistent and persistent. If you keep changing your response, your child will get confused about what behaviour elicits what kind of response. This can make boundary setting difficult.
- Tackle one behaviour at a time. Using Time Out for all the behaviours that you want to change will be exhausting for you and your child, and will reduce its effectiveness.
- Explain Time Out to your child before you need to use it. Let them know that you are using a new approach and what it will mean for them.
- Expect some escalation of misbehaviour when you first start using time-out. While some children will co-operate immediately, others will try to test you.

Also remember to:

- Pay attention to good behaviour. Respond to this with affection, parent-child time, and descriptive praise. This means being clear and specific about what they have done well, for example, "Ben well done for doing as I asked and helping me set the table".
- Make a list of a few behaviours you want to see more of, for example, playing nicely, speaking in a calm voice. This can help you to feel you are focussing on positives as well as negatives.

DON'T

- Try to explain things too much. You will just feel frustrated and ignored if your child continues to misbehave. Keep things simple.
- Argue or debate with your child.
- Give in to crying, whining or more inappropriate behaviour.
- Shout or lose control. Take a breath before responding if you feel your emotions running high.
- Keep talking about the incident once it is over.
- Give your child a chance to start fresh; don't bring up the past.
- Use Time Out for 'minor but irritating' behaviours such as nagging, fidgeting, or swearing. Keep it for big issues like physical aggression, tantrums and lack of compliance with important instructions.

Putting it Into Practice

As soon as the inappropriate behaviour occurs get your child's attention.

Give them a clear and specific instruction about what you want them to stop doing. Also give them a clear idea about what they should do instead.

For example, "Jenny stop pulling the cat's tail. Come here and help me with breakfast".

Give your child a few seconds to understand and comply. Remember to praise them if they do as asked!

If a serious behaviour doesn't stop or intensifies, begin the Time Out sequence.

Inform your child that they will go into Time Out and briefly tell them why – remember to keep it simple.

If needed, remind your child of the rules of Time Out.

Trouble-shooting Time Out

My child doesn't keep quiet in Time Out

Make sure your child understands that they need to be quiet in Time Out, for the period of time you set. Many parents fall into the trap of saying things like “go to your room until you are ready to behave” or “stay in Time Out for 5 minutes”.

The point is for your child to be quiet for the set amount of time. This is because it is much easier for children to calm down if they are not making noise. Once they are calm it will be easier for you to give them instructions about their behaviour.

My child keeps coming out of the room.

Children will often try to continue the interaction or try to communicate with you. If you respond to them, you are providing stimulation and attention. If this happens, take your child back to the room or the time out area with a minimum of fuss. Try not to make eye contact, stay calm, avoid talking to them or giving them attention, and gently direct them back to where they need to stay. If necessary, give them a quiet, calm reminder “you need to stay here and be quiet for two minutes”. Then leave.

Repeat this as many times as you need to gain compliance.

But when I've tried to do this they just get worse!

Often when parents introduce a new strategy or change their approach, a behaviour might get a bit worse before it gets better. This is because the child is ‘testing’ your new boundaries, trying to get things back to the way they were. It is at this early stage that it is most important that parents persist with Time Out, and be consistent.

If you are trying Time Out for the first time or changing how you currently use it, it can be helpful to wait for a weekend or a time when you can commit to seeing the strategy through. For example, if you have other children, make sure you have someone else around to watch them while you implement Time Out with one child.

My child always throws tantrums in public – it's so embarrassing. What can I do?

Children may get bored easily when they are out with parents, particularly when shopping or driving. Try to think of some fun and interesting things to engage them or to make the trip more interesting, for example, counting all the red cars that pass.

If misbehaviour occurs, it is best to respond as immediately as you can. Delaying a response too long means the child will not always connect the consequence with their earlier behaviour. If you are in public you can still follow through with giving specific instructions, and with Time Out if needed.

For example, “John stop pulling the boxes off the shelves. Come here now and help me find this next item on our shopping list”. If John continues to misbehave, think about what other options exist for Time Out. You can have a quiet moment in the aisle, or if behaviour escalates you may need to step outside the building or go to your car to implement Time Out.