

## Discipline: Properly Using A Time-Out

Putting a child in a time-out for bad behavior is one of the most common methods of discipline; however, it is often used incorrectly. The book [SOS Help For Parents](#) discusses the proper use of a time-out and details how to use it effectively to stop undesirable behavior. Following is a summary of key points noted in the book to help parents master the use of the time-out method.

One of the key elements in effectively using the time-out method is to have a suitable time-out place. For children between the ages of 2-4 years old, the book recommends using a tall straight-back chair placed within sight but out of the way of the normal play area.

For children 5-12 years old, the time-out place should be BORING and should not be the child's room. The best place for a time-out is a room where there is nothing interesting to see or do and where he/she will not be able to interact with anyone in the family. Good time-out locations include rooms such as a bathroom, a laundry room, the parents' bedroom or just a spot on the floor in a hallway.

Another key element to success is the use of a portable timer that rings. The timer should be set for one minute for each year of your child's life and should be placed within five to 10 feet of the time-out chair or time-out room. The portable timer takes the power struggle out of the arena because the timer and not the parent decides when the time-out is over.

For the time-out method to be effective, a parent should pick a few target misbehaviors and then use a time-pot consistently when the target behavior occurs

### TIME-OUT HIGHLIGHTS

- \* Send or take your child to the time-out place using no more than 10 words and 10 seconds. For example, one of your children hits the other, you say no hitting and quickly place the child in the time-out chair or room.
- \* The portable timer should be set for one minute for each year of the child's life (i.e., two minutes for a two-year old; 10 minutes for a 10-year old).
- \* For 2-4 year olds, lift your child onto the time-out chair and place the timer out of his/her reach but where the toddler can still see it. After the time-out is over, tell the child in just a few words why he/she was placed in time-out. A 3 or 4 year old may be able to tell you why he/she was in a time-out when asked. During the time-out, the parent must not make direct eye contact with toddler or respond verbally in any way to his/her cries or antics.
- \* For 5-12 year olds, the child should be sent to the time-out room with the timer placed inside the room or just outside the door. The child should be allowed to sit, stand or walk around the room but if he/she makes a mess or destroys things, the child should be required to clean it up or help pay for something he/she broke
- \* IGNORE your child while he/she is in a time-out.
- \* Do not scold or yell at your child after a time-out.
- \* Use a time-out consistently after target behavior occurs. Do not threaten to use a time-out, actually do it.
- \* Use time-out to bore your child and not to scare him/her.
- \* A parent may place two children in time-out at the same time using two different locations. Timing-out two children is effective when fights occur and the parent does not know who started the dispute.

Prior to using the method described above with your children, you should first explain to your children how a time-out will work and which behaviors will warrant a time-out. For younger children, a parent can demonstrate a time-out with a stuffed animal and explain that he/she may sit or kneel on the time-out chair but may not stand or get down until the timer rings.

A young child who refuses to stay in the chair should be handled slightly differently until he/she learns this is serious business and he/she must remain in the chair until the timer rings. The book suggests holding the child in the chair from the back or sitting the child on your lap during the time-out. (*Personally, I found this suggestion difficult having twins and other*

*siblings, so I used a booster seat, attaching it to a tall, straight-back chair and placing the chair in a hallway within sight. I strapped my toddler in the booster seat the first five or six times I began using this method. It worked well for me and now my children just sit in the regular chair until the timer rings.)*

The book also details how to handle rebellions from time-out and provides plans for parent to use to effectively manage these episodes. The author also suggests other uses for a time-out, such as timing-out a toy the children may be fighting over rather than the children themselves.

Remember, use a time-out for target behaviors only - your target list can be changed as occurrences of target behaviors begin to decrease. And remember, a key element for enhancing good behavior is PRAISE -- remember to praise your child when he/she is behaving well (such as sharing instead of grabbing toys away or hitting)!

Sources:

Clark, Lynn, Ph.D., *SOS Help For Parents*, Second Edition, Parents Press, Bowling Green, Ky. 1996

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