

## Discipline with Time-Out

When communicating with your child on a matter of discipline use the following rules:

- Use a calm but authoritative voice.
- Look your child straight in the eyes.
- Touch or hold your child on the shoulder, gently, but firmly.
- Talk only about what you want your child to do, or not to do. Do not chastise them for the moment.
- Your child gets a maximum of two passes at this technique of warning; if they still fail to comply then give: TIME-OUT.

Time-out is a form of discipline used to interrupt unacceptable behavior by isolating a child in a chair or room for a certain period of time. Time-out has the advantage of providing a cooling-off period for both the child and the parent. It gives a child over 2 or 3 years old a chance to think about their misbehavior and feel a little guilty about it. When a child is less than 2 years old, time-out mainly establishes who is in charge. Misbehaviors that respond best to time-out are aggressive, harmful, or disruptive behaviors that cannot be ignored. Time-out is much more effective than spanking, threatening, or shouting at your child. As a child grows older, use of time-outs can gradually be replaced with logical consequences.

Choose a good place for time-out. Playpens or cribs are a convenient place for time-out for older infants. A playpen near a parent is preferable to isolation in another room because most infants are frightened if they are not in the same room as their parent. An older child can be told to sit in a chair facing a corner. Some parents prefer to have their child stand facing the corner. Many parents prefer a room for time-out because it offers more confinement than a chair. The most convenient and safest room for time-out is the child's bedroom. Until 3 years of age, most children become frightened if they are put in a room with a closed door. Other ways to confine your child in a room without completely closing him off are a gate, a heavy dresser that blocks the lower part of the door frame, or a piece of plywood that covers the bottom half of the door.

Some children will come out of the bedroom just as soon as they are put in. If you cannot devise a barricade, then the door must be closed. You can hold the door closed for the 3 to 5 minutes it takes to complete the time-out period. If you don't want to hold the door, you can put a latch on the door that allows it to be temporarily locked. Be sure not to forget your child. The time-out should not last longer than a few minutes.

The time-out should be long enough for your child to think about his misbehavior and learn the acceptable behavior. A good rule of thumb is 1 minute per year of the child's age, with a maximum of 5 minutes. A kitchen timer can be set for the required number of minutes. Have your child understand that if they scream or whine, they will not hear the timer go off to know when time-out is up. If your child leaves time-out early ('escapes'), they should be returned to time-out and the timer should be reset. By the age of 6 years, most children can be sent to their room and asked to stay there until they feel ready to behave.

If your child misbehaves, briefly explain the rule they have broken and send them to the time-out chair or room. If your child doesn't go immediately, lead or carry them there. Expect your child to cry, protest, or have a tantrum on the way to time-out. Don't lecture or spank them on the way.

Once children understand time-out, most of them will stay in their chair corner, or room until the time is up. However, you will have to keep an eye on your child. If they get up from a chair, put them back gently, but quickly without spanking and reset the timer. If your child comes out of the room, direct them back into the room and reset the timer. Threaten to close the door if they come out a second time. If your child is a strong-willed 2 or 3 year old and you are just beginning to use time-outs, you may initially need to hold him in the chair with one hand on his shoulder for the entire 2 minutes. Don't be discouraged; this does teach them that you mean what you say. If your child yells or cries during time-out, ignore it. The important thing is that they remain in time-out for a certain amount of time. Your child will not be able to understand the need for quietness during time-out until at least 3 years of age, so don't expect this before then.

Make it clear that you are in charge of when time-out ends. When the time is up, go to your child and state, "Time-out is over. You can get up (or come out) now." Then treat your child normally. Don't review the rule your child broke. Try to notice when your child does something that pleases you and praise them for it as soon as possible.

If you have not used time-out before, explain it to your child in advance. Tell them it will replace spanking, yelling, and other such forms of discipline. Talk to them about the misbehaviors that will lead to time-outs. Also discuss the good behavior that you would prefer to see. Then pretend with your child that they have broken one of the rules. Take them through the steps of time-out so that they will understand your directions when you send them to time-out in the future. Also teach your babysitter about time-outs. Grandparents sometime don't consider it their place to discipline the child, and end up complicating your efforts. Discuss this time-out strategy with them, and get them to cooperate with your efforts. If need be, quote us as the source for using a time out strategy, and have them read this handout so that everyone is on the same page.

We recognize that all of this is easier said than done, but you must persist. Once your child knows the rules of the game, they will start to comply in 2 or 3 days. The most important thing here is to not lose control of yourself or the situation. Yelling, screaming, or spanking your child does not give you control.