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Using Time-Out for Behavior Problems Guidelines for Parents

Time-out is a procedure to reduce unacceptable child behavior. It involves placing your child in a dull place for a short period of time immediately following a behavior of which you do not approve. Time-out has been effective in reducing problem behavior such as tantrums, hitting, biting, failure to follow directions, bedtime and mealtime problems, and many others. In fact, parents report that the combination of time-in and time-out work much better than talking, reasoning, yelling, threatening, or spanking their children.

A. Preparations:

1. Choosing a time-out place: The time-out place could be a step, a chair, sitting on the floor, a bedroom, or the base of a tree if you were outside. The time-out place is where you tell the child sit or stand – it does not have to be the same place each time. This should not be a scary or unsafe place like a bathroom, garage, or basement. The key to time-out is not where it is. The key is that it is *time-out from your attention*.
2. The time-out place should be a place where your child cannot view the TV, or engage in other recreational or play activities.
3. There needs to be agreement between all care providers in the home on which behaviors will result in time-out. Remember, consistency is very important.

B. Practice:

1. Before using time-out for discipline, practice using it with your child during a time your child is not in trouble. If your doctor chooses to teach your child time-out in the office, you will *not* have to go over the rules at home.
2. Inform your child you will be using time-out instead of spanking, yelling, or threatening. Most kids are pleased to learn this.
3. Tell your child there are two rules when in time-out:

Rule 1: Begin timing your child's time-out *only* when your child is quiet. Once your child is quiet, if he/she begins to yell, cry, or say nasty words, the time stops and then starts over again when your child is quiet.

Rule 2: If your child leaves time-out before his/her time-out is completed:

- a) Lead him/her back to time-out without saying a single word and without making eye contact. Restart the time when he/she is quiet.
- b) Lead him/her to a bedroom that is safe (without talking or making eye contact) and close the door. Restart the time when he/she is quiet. Your child will complete the time-out in the bedroom.

C. Procedure:

1. Following a behavior you do not like, use three to six words to define the behavior and send the child to time-out. For example: "You hit your sister, time-out," "No hitting, time-out." Say this in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. *AND, say it only one time.* It is important to not lose your temper or nag your child with warnings. If your child does not go to time-out quickly, physically guide him/her to time-out. Guidance can range from walking along side your child to leading him/her part way by the hand to carrying him/her to time-out. When you carry your child to time-out, be sure to hold him/her facing away from you so he/she doesn't confuse a hug with a trip to time-out – and you don't get hit or kicked.

Remember, once you say TIME-OUT to your son or daughter, do not speak with him/her again until the required quiet time in the time-out location has been completed. Do not be tempted to "remind" the child that he/she has to be quiet.

2. When your child is sitting in time-out quietly, begin timing the time-out. You may choose to follow the rule of thumb of one minute of quiet per year of age. The maximum period of time-out that is necessary is five minutes, even for children over the age of five years. However, a brief time-out (one minute of quiet) is often sufficient for younger children. The purpose of time-out is to interrupt the behavior and give the child (and parent) time to calm themselves. If your child makes noises, talks, screams, or cries while in time-out, the time starts over. This happens *each time* the child makes any noises. (No need to "add time" for being noisy in time-out as this happens automatically by starting the time over.)

If your child leaves time-out before the quiet time is up, do one of the following *each time* your child leaves the time-out area:

- a) Lead the child back to the original time-out location without speaking to or making eye contact with the child and restart the time-out when he/she is quiet.
- b) If the child will not stay in the original time-out location, lead the child to a safe bedroom (without speaking to or making eye contact). Restart the time when he/she is quiet.

Remember, you decide when your child gets out of time-out, not your child.

3. If your child should go to time-out right away without any difficulty, feel free to release them from their time-out early.
4. After your child has been quiet in the time-out area for the required length of time, *go to the child and say:* "You have been quiet, you can get out now!" Do not make this statement from across the room.

5. After finishing a time-out, your child should start with a “clean slate.” It is not necessary to discuss, remind, or nag your child about what he/she did wrong. Within seconds of taking your child out of time-out, give a brief, easy instruction to your child. For example: “Hand me that paper,” “Push in the chair,” “Close the door,” “Come into the kitchen with me.”

These instructions help you to determine two things:

1. If your child is not ready to come out of time-out, you will know that right away. The child will not comply, and you return him/her to time-out immediately with the words: “You didn’t do what I asked, time-out.”
2. If your child is ready to come out of time-out, you immediately have the opportunity to praise him/her for appropriate behavior. “Thank you! I like it when you do what I say!” You have moved from a negative to a positive interaction with your child, everyone feels better, and you both start with a clean slate.

If you made a request that your child refused to do (like pick up his/her toys), place your child in time-out. After the time-out is completed, restate the instruction once again “You have been quiet, you can get out now. Please put your toys away.”

D. Summary of Rules:

1. For Parent:
 - Decide about behaviors you will use time-out for ahead of time. Briefly inform your child of these behaviors.
 - Avoid using warnings (“If you do that again, you will have to go to time-out”). Warnings teach your child not to listen to you the first time.
 - Do not nag, scold, or talk to your child when he/she is in time-out. **Remember, nobody can speak with or make eye contact with your child until the time-out is over.**
 - Remain calm, even when your child is being testy.
2. For Children:
 - Go immediately to time-out when you are instructed to. Do not argue.
 - Remain quiet and stay in time-out until you are instructed by your parent to get out. You will spend less time that way.
 - If you tease, laugh at, or talk with your brother or sister while he/she is in time-out, you will be placed in time-out.

Time-Out Checklist

Yes	No	
_____	_____	1. Is the time-out location away from distractions like the TV, radio, and toys but not in a scary place?
_____	_____	2. Do you place your child in time-out within five (5) seconds after he/she does not mind?
_____	_____	3. Do you briefly state the rule violation when placing your child in time-out?
_____	_____	4. Do you avoid showing anger like yelling, hitting, and spanking when placing your child in time-out?
_____	_____	5. Do you set the time for the correct amount of quiet time – one minute per year of life up to five minutes?
_____	_____	6. Do you start the time after the child is quiet?
_____	_____	7. Do you reset the timer when your child makes a noise or leaves time-out without permission?
_____	_____	8. Do you avoid talking to the child while he/she is in time-out?
_____	_____	9. Do you avoid eye contact with the child while he/she is in time-out?
_____	_____	10. Do you go to the time-out location and state to your child “You have been quiet, you may get out of time-out now”?
_____	_____	11. Do you allow your child to leave time-out when he/she has been quiet for the required period of time?
_____	_____	12. Do you physically show approval to your child for good behavior within five (5) minutes after a time-out?
_____	_____	13. Do you avoid nagging your child about the behavior that resulted in a time-out after the time-out is over?

*** The correct answer to all of the above questions is YES!!! ***