



Does "Time-Out" work for you?

Being parents of a 3.5 year old boy and a 2 year old girl, it is no surprise that we have been experiencing situations where our little girl would whack her big brother on his head when she couldn't get his attention, or the two little children fighting over a toy they each think should belong to themselves and refuse to share.

Like many other parents, we have been using a variety of disciplinary methods, and of course, the popular "time-out" tactic is one of them.

Many parents find time-out to be an effective way of disciplining their children, but for some parents, time-outs simply don't work. Why?

Giving children attention during time-out: Time-out is not a naughty chair or a naughty corner. It is not meant to be getting children to think through their misbehaviour. Time-out simply means to give a brief pause in a caregiver's interaction with a child. A lot of misbehaving in children is done to get attention. Scolding gives them the attention they are seeking. The actual lack of parental attention for a short period of time would allow a child to see that his/her behaviour would lead to losing attention instead of getting it, i.e. time out from 'positive reinforcement'. Grown-ups might recall how dejected they feel when they are excluded from a dinner party conversation.



Over-codified the timing of time-out: Time-out is only meant to give a child a break from a situation that has overwhelmed them into an unacceptable behaviour. Some parents insist on following the "minute-a-year guideline" , i.e. time-out lasts one minute for each year of a child' s age, but this is supposed to be a maximum time only, not a hard and fast rule. If the child can calm down sooner, say 30 seconds, then let it be.

Time out doesn' t work too well on big children: Older children, say when they reach 6 to 7 years old, may be mature enough to overthink time-outs and may spend the time thinking about some other naughty misbehaviour.

Using this tactic too often and for the wrong reason: Time-out usually works best on children who are oppositional and defiant by intentionally doing the opposite of what you ask. Using time-out too often, say for children who are merely whining about lollipops or more 'Fireman Sam' television time, may lead to a worse effect. Sometimes, the children may respond better to other approaches.

How to make 'time-out' work?

Clear warning: A single non-repetitive warning before every time-out can reduce the number of time-outs needed. If your child does not start



cooperating within one minute, then time-out commences.

Consistent: Threats and warnings do not work unless you actually make good on them. Give them a warning first, and if the children continue to misbehave after the warning, you need to follow through with the forewarned time-out, every time.

Immediate discipline: Time-outs are most effective when you implement them while the misbehavior is occurring or immediately afterwards. Children have short memories. If the consequence is not immediate, they tend to forget the misbehaviour and be confused when they are punished later.

Be specific on the misbehaviour: It is important that children are aware of the misbehavior that are targeted for reduction. Misbehaviour should be accurately explained to them, such as hitting or pushing someone else is wrong and so you are being timed-out.

Make it boring: Resist the urge to lecture them during time-out. In fact, ignore them even if he/she says things like "I hate you" , since even negative attention can act as a reward of encouraging him/her to misbehave.

Time-outs were never intended as the be-all and end-all of discipline. Parents need a big bag of tricks which vary on children with different personalities.



For our two little angels, we found that the following tends to be more effective:

Explain the cause-and-effect and let natural consequences play out: Our two little children respond well whenever we explain the consequences of their misbehaviour to them. We give them choices and let them know what the outcome will be regarding their choices. They will ultimately decide what will happen and experience the consequences.

For instance, I received comments from my daughter's teacher that my daughter can be quite stubborn sometimes and that there had been incident when her teacher asked her to

put her school bag on the shelf. She simply ignored her (though responded with a nice silly smile), but when the teacher told her that her school bag would be kicked away by other students and might get dirty, she quickly jumped up and put it back on the shelf.

My son sometimes would refuse to sit in a car seat, but whenever I showed him pictures of car accidents, there would be no more complaints from him anymore. In fact, he would explain to his sister why she needs to be put in a car seat.

Set clear expectations and be consistent with consequences:

Children have a way with finding loopholes and pushing boundaries.



Once you let them weasel their way out, they will do it again and again knowing at a certain point you will make exceptions and let them act out.

Be kind but firm; show empathy and

respect: In a child's mind, what he did was right and justified. As parents, instead of losing our temper and arguing back, we just need to stay calm and repeat what we said in a kind manner but very firmly. For instance,

'Hitting hurts, we do not hit our friends' . Also, show empathy to them, for example 'I know you really want the toy that your brother is playing with, but hitting is not right' .

Give them time to say goodbye to

their toys: It is our daily routine that whenever we want our child to finishing playing with their toys or television time, we set our timer and tell them they've got 5 more minutes, and after that they need to say goodbye to their toys or the television. This gives them sufficient time to be prepared for the parting, and we seldom experience resistance.

Treat mistakes as opportunities to

learn: We like using mistakes or bad behaviour as an opportunity to learn.

Last week, we bought a Santa Claus glass decoration for my son and he insisted on playing with it. We reminded him, "Do you remember last time you

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dropped your favourite sand glass on the floor after mummy asked you to pass it to me to hold?" He then quickly stopped yearning for it and let me put the glass decoration nicely on a shelf for him to see.

Reward for good behaviour: While it is clear what bad behaviour should be 'punished' , don' t forget to reward them for good behaviour, for example 'I am so proud of you for sharing your toys with your sister' . After all, they are just little children. Even grown-ups like being recognised. The positive effect of rewarding / praising a child is usually more effective than punishing a child who is not willing to share.

After all, there is no hard-and-fast disciplinary rule for all. It may work well for one, but may not for another. In fact, the pace our children are growing up at is sometimes just too fast for us to adapt and keep up. So, enjoy and grow with them!

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