

# Questions & Answers about positive time out

Giving your child time out can encourage him or her to behave, if used the right way. Quiet time alone gives children time to calm down so that they can play again with other children. Time out should not be used as a punishment, but as a chance for children to correct their behavior. Using time out positively helps children learn from their mistakes as they grow.

## 1. How old should my child be before time outs will work?

Infants and toddlers should never be set apart from others or ignored. They are not old enough to know what time out means. Instead, give infants and toddlers something positive to do. For example, a child who is coloring on the table might be given a piece of paper to color. A child who pulls the kitten's tail might learn how to gently pet a stuffed animal. Or, the child might learn that being mean to the kitten will cause the kitten not to play with the child.

## 2. How should I use time out with my preschool child?

Use care when giving time out to

preschool children. It should be no longer than 2-3 minutes at a time. Young children naturally believe that the world revolves around them. When things don't go their way, they often get upset and lose control. Give children time to calm down and get control of their feelings.

If your preschool child is frustrated because he didn't get his way, give him a hug and say, *"You're really upset now. Let's go have some quiet time together to read a book or snuggle for awhile."* Then set him in a quiet place to calm down.

Parents can show children how they calm down when stressed. After driving home in rush-hour traffic, you might say to your child, *"I am feeling*

*frustrated right now. I need some quiet time to calm down. Shall we listen to some music and relax for a few minutes?"*

## 3. Should preschool children be left alone during time out?

Parents should not leave children alone, unless the child wants to be alone. For safety reasons, parents should always watch children during a time-out period.

## 4. Where should I take my preschool child during time out?

Parents can create a special place for time out with pillows, stuffed animals, and other comfort items that will help children feel calm and safe.

## 5. How should I use time out with my school-age child?

By the time children reach school age, they are learning self-control. They can talk about what problems their actions and behavior caused. School-age children usually lose control when playing games with other children, or when they are being teased or bullied. Removing the child from the problem situation allows him or her to calm down

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before playing again.

Explain to your child why he or she needs time out. Parenting experts recommend giving one minute of time out for each year of the child's life. For example, 10-year-old Simone is shoving other children out of the way when they are playing soccer in the park. Simone's father takes her aside and tells her, "*Simone, you need to calm down before you can return to the game. Please sit over here on the grass until you feel you can play without pushing others.*" In 10 minutes, if Simone hasn't re-joined the game, her father will go up to her and ask if she is ready to play again. Children like knowing that time out only lasts for a short while.

### **6. Is it good to send my 7-year-old son to his room for time out after he hits his little sister?**

Sending your son to his room to *think about what he has done* is using guilt and shame to get a child to do better. This makes most kids think about how angry they are at their parent (or even how to get even), instead of how to do better. Parents don't encourage their children to do better by making them feel worse. Kids tend to do better when they feel better. Instead, ask your son to go to his room for a time to calm down until he feels better. You could say, "*I would like for you to take a short time out in your room and give yourself a chance to calm down. As soon as you feel better—you can decide when*

*that is—and are ready to change your behavior, you may come out.*"

### **7. Isn't spanking a child just as good as time out and doesn't involve so much effort?**

Spanking, slapping, or hitting children will get their attention, but it doesn't teach children how to behave. Striking a child can make a child so upset that he or she can't pay attention to what a parent is saying. It is difficult to reason with a screaming child. Time out allows a child to move away from stressful situations and to calm down. Spanking only adds to the child's stress.

Physical punishment teaches the child that hitting is a good way to solve problems. It may lead to abuse. Children who are hit may hit other children. Hitting children can embarrass them and make them feel bad about themselves. It shows that a parent has lost control and is acting on emotions instead of with reason and understanding.

### **8. Sometimes my five-year-old son gets upset during time out and continues to be out of control. What do I do then?**

Make the area safe and give him room to work out his problems. Offer to stay with him and soothe him until he begins to calm down. Give him things that will help him calm down (relaxing music, a drink, a pillow to hug). Let him know that this is not a punishment, but a time for him to relax in a safe place

until he can regain control. Show him by your words and attitude that you believe he is able to work through this difficult time. You might say, "*It's difficult when you don't always get your way, isn't it?*" Allow him to deal with his problem instead of letting him get his way.

### **9. Time out used to work for my daughter when she was younger, but now that she is six, it doesn't seem to help anymore. She doesn't want to stay in her timeout corner. What should I do?**

You and your daughter can choose a different time out location that might serve her needs now that she is older. Choose a place that is away from other activity and that will allow her time to calm down. You can also use other methods of positive discipline:

■ **Use natural or logical outcomes\*** to give children chances to learn from the choices they make. **Natural:** *If you leave your bike outside, someone may take it.* **Logical:** *If you ride your bike without a helmet, we will put the bike away.*

■ **Praise good behavior** rather than punish misbehavior. You can use material rewards, but understand that children might concentrate on the reward more than on their behavior.

■ **Establish rules and set clear limits.** Follow through when rules are broken or limits are violated.

**10 My 7-year-old son won't stay in his room when I put him in time out. I've started locking the door to keep him in. Is this a good idea?**

Locking a child in his room is not a good idea. This is punishment, which may make him angry and rebellious. Punishing him won't help him learn how to behave better the next time he feels frustrated. Instead, he will most likely be angry toward you for locking him in his room.

A better approach would be to talk calmly with him while he is in time out. You can help him understand his frustration, while giving him space to regain self-control. Some children may prefer to talk after they calm down—use your best judgment based on your child's personality. A positive approach will help him develop the resources he needs to face difficult situations in life. Plus, he will understand that he has your guidance and support as he grows older.

It is important to try positive time out, natural/logical outcomes, and other positive ways of guiding your child. If you have been trying these techniques for several weeks and your child's behavior has not improved, please do not resort to punishment. Your child's pediatrician or a child therapist may be able to provide you with more specific ways to effectively guide your child.

\* See the handout, "Natural and Logical Consequences" in this same series.

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