



# Time Out and Other Discipline Tools That Work

Kathy L. Jelley  
Sarah Michelle Moore

**T**ime out is a well-known discipline technique that has gained popularity among parents trying to manage and guide children's behavior. When used appropriately, time out is an effective discipline tool; however, it is often overused in trying to handle too many situations of misbehavior. Time out is most effective when used for only a few specific situations.

No one discipline technique works with every type of misbehavior. A parent needs to learn and be equipped with many discipline tools to guide their child's behavior successfully. Here are several strategies that may be helpful.

## Time Out

Time out is a technique used to interrupt an unacceptable behavior by removing the child from the situation where the misbehavior is occurring. Before using time out the child must understand the concepts of "waiting" and "quiet;" this usually occurs by age three. The time out location selected should be a quiet, dull place devoid of activity. Preschool age children should be placed in an area where you can see them at all times. Children should be expected to stay in the time out for no more than one minute per year of age—for example, a four year old would be given four minutes. Explain the time out procedure ahead of time. Walk the younger child through the procedure until he or she understands. Time the quiet time only (not the time spent whining, yelling, or crying). When the time is up, explain to the child again what behavior is appropriate and allow him or her to return to the activity. Praise the child for using appropriate behavior.

When time out doesn't work: Time out won't work if it is overused. If you use time out for every behavior problem, the effectiveness will lessen because it becomes an automatic response: "I yelled, now I'm in time out, and now

I'm done." Also make sure to choose a toy-free place for the time out. Choosing a location where there are tons of toys and distractions, such as the child's room, won't allow the child to think about what they have done wrong (Family Education Network, 2006).

## Setting Reasonable Limits

Children need to have reasonable limits placed on their behaviors. Limits help prevent misbehavior by setting boundaries for a child. Limits are important rules a family decides on that are necessary to protect the child and others from physical and psychological harm and to protect property. An example would be, "You are never allowed to play in the street because you might get hit by a car. You may play in the backyard."

- Four or five limits or rules will probably be enough. Too many rules can get confusing.
- Explain limits clearly and simply to the child so he or she understands what is expected.
- Explain the consequences for breaking the limit or rule.
- Be consistent in enforcing the limit and the consequence.
- Let the child help in setting some limits. They will probably be more cooperative in following the rule.

## Distraction or Redirection

When a child is about to start or is already engaged in a behavior that you do not want, stop the child and redirect his attention to a more desirable activity. Calmly stop the behavior, explain why, then substitute another activity. If a toddler is banging a toy truck on the floor, for example, gently take the truck away and offer a softer toy that will

not hurt the floor or anyone else nearby. If an older child is running dangerously through the house, explain that he could hurt himself or someone else by running. Ask if he would like to go outside where he can run, or ask if he would prefer to play a board game with you.

### Assisted Compliance

Assisted compliance in an unsafe situation involves physically helping the child to do what you have requested. It involves three steps:

1. Remind the child of the rule: “You do not jump on the bed.”
2. Give a choice: “You may sit on the bed or you may jump on the floor.”
3. If the child does not do as requested, physically assist him to do so. For example, gently take the child from the bed and place him on the floor. You may need to repeat these steps several times before the child cooperates.

Assisted compliance in a dangerous situation involves giving a clear command, physically assisting the child to do what you said, then explaining and offering choices for future use. For example, if a child ran into the street after a ball, you would sternly command the child to stop and physically stop her. After she is out of danger, explain that she could get hurt running into the street. Ask her to come and get you the next time her ball rolls into the street.

### Natural and Logical Consequences

The use of consequences can help children learn that unpleasant things happen to them as a direct result of their choices or misbehavior. Children will learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Consequences may happen naturally or they can be decided by the parent. An example of a natural consequence would be the hunger resulting when a child does not eat his lunch. He may have to endure the discomfort of hunger pains until snack or dinner time. An example of a logical consequence would be a twelve-year-old girl losing her phone privileges for a week after abusing her phone privileges. An abuse of privileges may be talking on the phone for 45 minutes when the limit is 15 minutes.

Keep the following points in mind when enforcing consequences.

- Tell the child what the consequences are before he or she breaks the rule.
- Relate the consequence directly to the misbehavior.
- The consequence must occur each time the misbehavior does.

When logical consequences don't work: Logical consequences don't work when the rules are arbitrary or don't seem to make sense to the child. They also don't seem to work when the child has had no or little input on the listing of the rules. By getting the child's input, he or she will be more likely to follow the rules and accept the consequences. Another time when they won't work is when the parent does not follow through with the consequences. If the child talks on the phone for 45 minutes when the limit is 15 minutes, and does not have phone privileges taken away, she will not respect the rules in the house.

### Other Helpful Ideas

- Model the type of behavior you want your child to exhibit.
- Call the child's name and get his or her attention before giving orders or instructions.
- Give a 5- to 10-minute warning before you ask a child to stop what he or she is doing and do what you request.
- Spend quality time with each child.
- Recognize and praise positive behavior.

### References

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension

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