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Time-out: Does it Really Work?

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Time-out is a common technique used by many parents in an attempt to suppress negative behaviors while disciplining their children. Despite a controversial past, research supports the use of *time-out* in conjunction with positive behavioral techniques. In other words, if parents implement time-out appropriately, it can go a long way to curb negative behaviors and make way for positive behaviors to shine.

When implementing a punitive strategy such as *time-out*, experts suggest parents look for and praise age-appropriate behavior often. Compromising, so long as it does not reinforce negative behavior, may be sufficient disciplinary action for some children instead of *time-out*. If parents do decide to incorporate time-out into their disciplinary routine, they should know there is not a specific formula to follow, but the suggestions below may be a good place to start.

Suggestions for an Effective *Time-out*

- *Time-out* is most appropriate for two to six year old children.
- Keep it simple – focus on one or two problem behaviors.
- Clearly communicate and demonstrate *time-out* will consistently occur in response to the selected negative behaviors – always follow through!
- Give clear commands, allow 5 seconds for processing, and praise any movement toward compliance immediately.
- In response to non-compliance, give one clear warning and then follow through with the consequence.
- A physically aggressive child should immediately go to *time-out*.
- Stick to one *time-out* spot – experts recommend a chair. This way, using time-out can generalize to other chairs in contexts outside the home.
- Use a timer (2-5 minutes is long enough).
- Allow kids to return to the activity they were removed from when time is up, especially if they were placed in *time-out* after attempting to escape a particular activity.

Every child is different and certain strategies may be more effective than others. In any case, it is up to parents to decide which method is most appropriate for their children. A strategy that allows children to flex their muscles of independence properly while learning appropriate social behavior is a sure bet!



Resources

“The Science of Timeouts: How to Make Them Work for Your Kids” by Stephanie Pappas. Retrieved 6/6/2017 from <http://www.livescience.com/>.

“How to Do Timeout: 12 Tips from Science” by Stephanie Pappas. Retrieved 6/6/2017 from <http://www.livescience.com/>

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