

Time-In: When Time Out Doesn't Work

Time-outs often reduce unwanted behaviors, for two good reasons.

1. They let the child (and you too, perhaps) cool down, collect one's thoughts, and consider alternate ways to act.
2. A child usually experiences a time-out as punishment, and a punishment (if quick, mild and not overused) can motivate a change in behavior.

Every parent needs some way of effectively punishing a child on occasion, and time outs are a good way (since they calm the emotions and don't require hurting the child). Of course, parents need to do a lot more than punish. Parents need to teach children how to act cooperatively, solve their own problems, and so forth, and punishment doesn't teach the right way to do things. For that, you need strategies like "Time-in."

"What Is Time-In?"

Time-in is a way of connecting with children. It is a discipline tool that asks, *What lesson does this child need to learn?* Then it asks, *Which time-in tool best invites the child to learn that lesson* — **Attend, Ask, Act, or Amend?**

Time-in:

- ▶ Keeps the child connected with the adult; they do not have the isolating effect or the possible threat of abandonment that time-out can have.
- ▶ Requires the child to do the thinking and to be responsible, rather than to be compliant or rebellious about the adult's demands.
- ▶ Provides the adult with four options from which to choose: ask, act, attend, and amend, rather than depending on one technique such as time-out.

What Does Attend Mean?

Attend means that parents are attending to what is going on. They are attending to what they see and maybe even to what they can't see.

If we don't understand why a child is misbehaving, the very first thing to do is to attend. What is going on? What is happening in the child's life? Are we expecting too much? Are we expecting too little? Does this child need more guidance? Attending is very important for grownups because it helps them decide whether to act, ask or have the child make amends.

Second, it is important to teach the child how to attend. When the child spills milk, rather than yelling at the child, we teach the child how to wipe up the spilled milk.

How Do You Act?

You act decisively to interrupt or redirect a behavior. You act when you have a child who is a wiggler. Wiggly children are often kinesthetic learners. Sometimes they don't easily recall what we have told them to do. Taking this child by the hand, leading her where you want her to go, standing right in front of her, or interrupting a very young child's activity to guide her to something else are all actions that can be used to discipline.

Why Ask?

Asking encourages children to think and to be responsible. Say, "*What can you do about this?*" Ask the child to think. If you say, "*You are bad and you must do this.*" you have already done the thinking and the child can either accommodate or resist. It is very important not to make the questions a criticism.

When Is It Important To Make Amends?

It is important to make amends if there is a big wrong that needs to be righted. It is important to make amends on little things when you are teaching a child how to make amends. Do it when you have the time and the patience to carry through.

Also, you make amends when you have wronged the child. You teach the child about amends by making amends. *“I’m sorry I wasn’t able to read to you tonight. I know you like our reading time. What can I do to make it up to you?”*

Time-In Practice Sheet

Example: Child has broken a rule the child knows. Do not throw toys in the house.
Throw balls and Frisbees outside.

Ask -

Ask a question that will teach the lesson you want the child to learn.

In a reassuring voice:

“Andy, do you remember the rule about throwing toys? What is it?”

Act -

Act to interrupt or redirect a misbehavior.

Pick up the toy and hold it out at arm’s length. In a reassuring voice:

“Andy, let’s think of three ways toys could hurt if you throw them.”

Attend -

If a person is hurt:

- ▶ Stop the activity.
- ▶ Apply first aid if needed.
- ▶ Attend to the victim as you teach the child how to attend.
- ▶ Empower the victim.

In a reassuring voice:

“Andy, Katlin has been hurt. You get the cold pack from the freezer and then stay beside us while we help Katlin.”

“Katlin, do you remember the rule about throwing toys?”

“Katlin, can you tell Andy that rule yourself or do you want to listen while I tell him?”

“Katlin, do you want to tell Andy how you feel?”

If an object is damaged:

- ▶ Attend to the object in a way that encourages the child to be responsible.

“This toy is broken. You can’t play with it unless we can fix it. Do you think we can do that? How?”

Amend -

Help the child decide how to make a restitution in a way that satisfies the victim or helps someone similar and helps the offending child to learn positive ways to interact with others. May be a repayment of time, objects or services, or a restoration of reputation.

In a reassuring voice:

“Andy, when you threw Tommy’s clay dinosaur you ruined his artwork. Now you need to make amends. Do you want me to help you think of ways to make it right? Your ‘amends’ will have to satisfy Tommy.”

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