

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Time Out

What Is Time Out?

Time out is a way of correcting behavior by placing a misbehaving child in a quiet place alone for a few minutes and then talking about the problem.

Time out is a technique you can use with children ages 3 to 12 when they are noisy, fighting, or doing something so annoying you can't ignore it. It is best to think of a time out as a way to calm everyone involved, not as a way to punish a child. Time out is a short, boring time away from others.

How To Use Time Out

1. Begin by talking about time out with a child or a group of children when everything is going well. Say, for example: "The next time you argue about toys, we will try a time out. This means that each of you will go to a different place for five minutes. I will let you know when five minutes is up."
2. Assign each child a separate place to go. This can be a chair in another room, their own rooms, or a corner of the kitchen. Just make sure that the location is boring, safe, well lit, and within your view if the child is very young.
3. When you need to call a time out announce it calmly. Remain calm so that the children will

understand that this is not a punishment, but rather a time for everyone to calm down and think about what happened.

4. If a child doesn't want to stay in his or her assigned area, calmly return the child, over and over, until she does stay.
5. When the time out is over, let the children know they can return to their activities. Don't make a big deal about it, just announce that time out is over, or simply let the timer ring.
6. As they go back to doing whatever they were doing before time out, let each child correct the behavior or say he is sorry for hurting another child. You can take some time to talk about why he was on time out and how you expect him to behave now. Be sure to praise the child when he behaves the way you want him to.

Advantages

- ⇒ Time out is a good way to stop disruptive behavior.
- ⇒ It creates a physical distance between a child and the problem.
- ⇒ Time out gives everyone a chance to calm down.

Disadvantages

- ⇒ Children may resist staying quietly in time out until they understand the rules. Adults must be sure to always enforce the rules the same way.
- ⇒ Time out is easy to overuse. It doesn't work as well when used too much.
- ⇒ It's easy to misuse time out as a punishment or as a way to get a child out of your hair. It should be used a cooling-off period and a chance to talk about the behavior after the time out is over.

Guidelines For Using Time Out

Time out should **not** be used as a punishment or as a way to threaten, humiliate, or frighten children.

Parents and caregivers can take a time out too. When things get too intense for both you and your child, remove yourself from the situation. For example, if your child is being really rotten at the dinner table, say: "I really don't like eating dinner when you are spitting your food on the floor, I am going to eat in the kitchen. When you stop spitting I will come back to eat with you."

Where Should The Child Be On Time Out?

Younger children should be kept within your sight. They may need to sit next to you.

Older children should go to an area that is well-lit, free from dangerous things, and boring. There should be no television, toys, books, etc. It should also be far enough away so the child can't bother others, but close enough so the child will know what he is missing.

How Long Should A Child Be On Time Out?

The younger the child, the shorter the time out. A good rule is to use one minute for every year of the child's age. Keep in mind that the goal of time out is to calm the child down. The amount of time this takes will vary from child to child. It is also important that the time out should be short enough so the child can return to the situation and correct her behavior. Praise the child for behaving better after time out.

Research has shown that 4 to 6-year-olds who are told to remain on time out until they decide they are calm and have thought about how to solve the problem are more likely to change their behavior in the future than children who simply are put on time out for a set amount of time.

At What Age Is It Best To Use A Time Out?

In order for time out to work, the child must be able to understand the ideas of being quiet and of waiting. This usually doesn't happen until a child is 2½ or 3 years old.

For younger or very sensitive children, try a tiny time out. When a child does something mean to another child, remove the misbehaving child from the situation and place him a short distance away on time out. Then take care of the child who was hurt or wronged. After that, return to the child on time out and explain why his behavior was wrong.

Source:
Rose Allen, Positive Parenting, Minnesota Extension Service, 1994

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