

A Parent's Guide to Using Time-Out

Time-out is an effective way for parents to stop bad behaviors in their child. For time-out to work, you must do it the same way every time. Also, make sure to reward good behavior often when the child is not in time-out. For example, give a pat on the shoulder or a hug, give your child praise, or start a sticker chart.

Preparing for the Use of Time-Out

- Put a timer where the child can see it. Although a smartphone timer is fine, an inexpensive, portable kitchen timer also works well.
- Pick a good spot for time-out. During time-out, the child should not be able to hear the radio or other music, hear or see the television, or be able to look out a window. The time-out spot shouldn't be the child's bedroom or someplace a lot of people will be walking through. It shouldn't be uncomfortable or confining (like a closet). There should be nothing dangerous or poisonous nearby.
- Only use time-out for the most problematic behaviors, like hitting a brother or sister or not following important directions.

- You should be very clear with your child about which behaviors will result in time-out and how time-out works. It may help to walk your child through the process of time-out and let your child know what happens if he or she does not stay in time-out. Only use time-out for the behaviors you have decided on ahead of time and have talked about with your child.

Using Time-Out

- Once a behavior that you've decided will result in time-out occurs, quickly explain in a matter-of-fact way that the child must go to time-out and why. Stay calm and walk or carry the child to time-out. Don't speak to the child or make eye contact.
- Set the timer for one minute for each year of the child's age up to five minutes.
- If the child screams or gets up before the time is up, place the child back in time-out without talking to or looking at the child, and reset the time. The child must be quiet for the entire time before leaving time-out. Make sure to stay busy and out of view of your child during time-out. Remind brothers and sisters and others

continues



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2018 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.

A Parent's Guide to Using Time-Out *(continued)*

that they should not interact with the child who is in time-out.

- Once the time-out is over, the child should have a clean slate. Don't dwell on the problem behavior or let it influence how you treat the child after the time-out. If necessary, ask the child to apologize (for example, to the person he or she hit) or to clean up a mess caused by the problem behavior.
- Make sure that time-in is pleasant. Look often for chances to praise or reward your child for good behavior.

Tips if Time-Out Isn't Working

- Make sure you are using time-out the same way every time
- Make sure the child isn't being warned multiple times before time-out is started
- When a child is in time-out:
 - Don't look at the child
 - Don't talk to the child
 - Don't talk about the child
 - Remain calm and do not show anger
 - Monitor from close by, but not in the same room
 - Be consistent and don't give up

May 2018