



# Traditional Time-Out



Time-out is a well-known method of discipline that can be effectively used with many toddlers and early grade school-age children, although some parents and caregivers report difficulties with this method. The idea behind time-outs is that the child is removed from people and made to sit quietly for a designated period of time. While more trauma-sensitive methods are presented in the Time-in and Positive Time-out article in this section of this toolkit, an overview of traditional time-outs is included here to help ensure that this method is used appropriately and in the most trauma-sensitive manner possible.

## Choose a Time and Place

The first step in making time-outs work is choosing a suitable place. This should be in a location where you can monitor the child to ensure safety and compliance. Consider a name for the area such as the “thinking place.” Make sure the area is boring – away from television, toys and other forms of amusement.

A good rule of thumb for the time is one minute per year of the child’s age. It is important to keep close track of the time. Some have found that a kitchen timer works well.

## Introduce the Time-Out Spot

Don’t spring time-out on a child. When a caregiver and child are both in a good mood, show the child the spot and explain what it is: a quiet place to go when misbehaving and failing to follow rules, or when needing to calm down. Choose three to five misbehaviors (examples: hitting, biting, angry yelling, throwing a tantrum), and be specific about which broken rules will lead to a time-out. Let the child know how long he/she will have to stay in time-out, and explain that when time-out is over (when the timer or alarm rings) he /she can return to activities.

## Don’t Wait to Discipline

If a child earns time in the “thinking place,” take him/her there immediately. Don’t wait until finishing a task, such as watching a television show or washing dishes. Time-outs are most effective when given while the misbehavior is happening or immediately afterward. Young children have short memories, so if the consequence isn’t immediate, they are apt to forget the misbehavior and be confused when they are disciplined later.

## Keep Your Cool

Time-outs are a way to give the misbehaving child a break to regain self-control, but it is also important to keep your own emotions in check. When a child is given a time-out avoid yelling, spanking, criticizing, or

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getting into long-winded versions of “I told you so.” Simply state the inappropriate behavior in a firm and calm tone of voice, without too much explanation, and send the child to the time-out location. All you need to say is, “No hitting, Mary. Go to time-out.”

### **Make it Stick**

Once you have explained that a specific behavior will lead to time-out, follow through with it every time so the child takes time-outs seriously.

Getting a child to stay in time-out can be difficult. Children may keep getting up or scoot their way out of the designated area, or try to position themselves to see or participate in ongoing activities. If the child refuses to stay put, hold him/her firmly in place for the duration of the time-out, or take the child back to the time-out spot every time the child leaves and restart the timer. If it is necessary to hold the child in place, do so quietly, without talking, as the purpose is to keep the child in the time-out space long enough for the child to calm down. Children will learn quickly that it is easier to sit and finish a time-out the first time so they can rejoin the fun.

### **Move On**

Once the timer or alarm rings to indicate that the time-out is over, have a quick chat with the child. Ask if he/she understands what misbehavior earned the time-out. Allow the child to express feelings and very briefly remind him/her that time-outs occur when rules are broken or to help tone things down. Praise the child for completing the time-out.

