

Time Out

Help for parents to identify when to stop some of your child's behavior



What Is Time Out?

“Time out” is the removal of your child from activities, rewards, and attention. Time out is meant to help stop some of your child's behaviors that you find upsetting or harmful, and it can provide quick and lasting results if used properly. It does not cause any harm to your child, and it also can help you feel less angry and upset with your child. It is easy to learn, and with a little practice it becomes easy to use.

Use Time Out for:

- Hitting, slapping, or pinching
- Throwing or breaking things
- Being mean to animals or people
- Disobeying an instruction
- Breaking a house rule
- Cursing or swearing
- Doing dangerous things
- Threatening others
- Hostile arguing
- Damaging property

Don't use Time Out for:

- Fussiness, complaining
- Talking back
- Mild arguing
- Legitimate accidents (e.g., spilling something, dropping something)
- Whining
- Asking same questions over and over
- Repeating things
- Doing things to get your attention
- Bad attitude

Getting Ready

Pick two or three behaviors you'd like to get rid of. Check the lists above to make sure these are the right kinds of behavior for time out.



From now on, I will give a time out to my child when:

Pick some behaviors you'd like to see instead of the problem behaviors. These could be things like playing safely and quietly, following through on a task, or being kind to a sibling. They should be the "opposite" of the behaviors chosen for time out.



From now on, I will try to praise or reward my child for:

Pick a dull and boring place for the time out. It should be easy to get to quickly, and it should not have anything interesting nearby.



Our time out place will be:

If you have not done so already, pick a time to tell your child about time out. Choose a time when everything is going well and everybody is calm. Make sure your child understands that you still care about him or her, but that some behaviors will mean that your child must stop what he or she is doing and go to time out. Explain that this will be a new rule for your family. It is not something the child can argue about, and it is meant to help everyone feel better and have fun when you are together.



Here is when I plan to explain time out to my family:

What to Do

- 1** **Give an instruction** (for example, “Please get out of your sister’s room,” or “Please do not tip back in your chair at the dinner table”).

- 2** **Count to 5** in your head. If your child does not follow through, then...

- 3** **Give your child a single warning** Be clear and brief (for example, “If you don’t get out of your sister’s room, you will have a time out,” or “If you don’t put your chair flat on the floor, you will have a time out”).

- 4** **Count to 5** in your head again. If your child does not follow through, then...

- 5** **Instruct your child to go to time out.** Do this quickly and calmly. State the specific reason for the time out, but try to use no more than 10 words in 10 seconds.

- 6** **Don’t explain.** Don’t argue, scold, or even talk with your child once a time out has been issued. These rules have already been explained before. Now it’s time to put timeout into action.

- 7** **Set a timer.** It can help to use a timer to keep track of how long the time out will be. For most children, 5 minutes is an appropriate length of time. It will help if your child can see the timer, but place it out of your child’s reach.

- 8** **Reset the timer if needed.** If your child is screaming or yelling in time out, you may reset the timer. The time out begins when your child is settled.

- 9** **Talk calmly afterwards.** After you let your child out of time out, check to see if he or she knows why you gave a time out. If your child says, “I don’t know” calmly explain the reason, but don’t lecture.

- 10** **Repeat the instruction** calmly, and go back to step 4.

Help! Time Out Isn't Working!

Problem:	Try This:
<p>My child argues and talks back.</p>	<p>Ignore backtalk and arguing. Do not get into a discussion. If the arguing escalates into yelling, simply reset the timer when your child settles down.</p>
<p>My child tantrums and makes a mess when I give a time out.</p>	<p>Have your child do the time out anyway, and then when it is over, issue an instruction for your child to clean up his or her mess.</p>
<p>My child does not believe me when I give a time out.</p>	<p>Never give a time out unless you mean it, and never give more than one warning. Once a time out is given, it must be followed through. Over time, your child will learn that you mean it.</p>
<p>My child will not go to time out or leaves time out before it is over.</p>	<p>You can restate that your child needs to go to time out and gently guide your child back to the time out area. Another option is to take away privileges or toys for failure to follow through on a time out.</p>
<p>We are out at a store or a friend's house, so I can't give a time out.</p>	<p>When you go out shopping or visit neighbors, it can be helpful to pick a time out place as soon as you arrive and to let your child know about it. You can also bring the timer with you. If you can't find a good time out place, you can have your child sit in a boring place right where you are. Just make sure you can always see your child when giving a time out away from home. If you need help thinking of more ideas, don't be afraid to ask the therapist.</p>
<p>Other people in my home aren't helping me.</p>	<p>Talk to your family about this at a time when things are calm. Explain that everyone has to work together and follow the same rules or the problem behaviors won't improve. In fact, they might even get worse.</p>