

**Time-Out** is one of the most popular but most misunderstood and overused parenting tools. In society's effort to move away from physical punishment to manage behavior, we have moved toward emotional punishment. Children are sent to the Time-Out Chair to "think about what you did wrong until I say you can get up!" Unfortunately, the original issue gets lost, replaced by a new power struggle over the Time-Out Chair. Children often rebel and refuse to sit in the chair. Or they sit and think of a revenge plan and how not to get caught next time while experiencing shame and discouragement that, over time, often leads to more misbehavior and low-self esteem.



## Two Types of Time-Outs



### **Punitive Time Out:**

**Goal:** To get immediate results that stop the undesirable behavior.

**Responsibility:** In the adults' hands (must manage time and place for time out)

**Focus:** Blame. "You are doing something wrong."

**Inspires:** Rebellion, compliance out of fear, resentment.

### **Positive Time Out:**

**Goal:** To stop the undesirable behavior while teaching life skills; boundaries are held in a respectful way.

**Responsibility:** In the child's hands (must choose calming techniques and a solution).

**Focus:** Solutions. "You can't do this so you need to make a different choice."

**Inspires:** Self-discipline, anger management skills.

### **Positive Time-Out is positive because it:**

- ▶ is respectful; children are involved participants rather than victims of the process
- ▶ teaches children that their brains don't function well when they are upset; they learn the value of calming down so hurtful words and actions are avoided and solutions can be reached together
- ▶ teaches positive human relationship tools: self-control, personal responsibility

This method is more likely to help shape your child into the responsible, respectful adult we all hope for.

### **Brain research supports Positive Time-Outs**

Road rage, tantrums, ranting and raving. Young or old, we all have moments when our emotions take over and poor decisions are made. The latest brain research has revealed to us that when strong emotions are experienced, we are operating from the brain's limbic system.

This is the place where fight or flight instincts take over. The ability to listen to others, to be socially appropriate, see another's perspective and problem solve is NOT available. When the strong feelings pass, we begin to operate from our brain's prefrontal cortex. From here we CAN be appropriate, apologize, problem solve, cooperate and think rationally.

Knowing this, does it make any sense to try and resolve an issue when the child and/or parent's brain is flooded with emotions? Not every issue must be solved immediately; there is plenty of time to go back in five minutes or five days and creatively problem solve and attain cooperation.

## Steps for Creating Positive Time-Out Areas

1. **Wait until the age of 2 ½ before implementing positive time-outs.** Toddlers lack the ability to understand cause and effect. Young toddlers need close supervision and redirection to an acceptable activity.
2. **Discuss the purpose of time-out.** Explain that all of us have times when we lose control of ourselves or find ourselves in a bad mood. We feel too bad to know the best thing to say or do. It is helpful to have a time-out place to go to until the bad feelings pass.
3. **Have child pick time-out spot.** A place in their room, a big cardboard box they decorate, a cozy section of the couch, a space created by mosquito netting. Brainstorm with them what things might help them calm down and feel better. Place items in the time-out spot (i.e. stuffed animals, pillows, books, punching bag, drawing and writing materials, music, etc.) Parents can cross unreasonable items off the list (i.e. candy, loud music, TV).
4. **Establish rules for the use of Positive Time-Out.** Together come up with guidelines so that the time-out area isn't misused. Examples could be: only one person at a time in the space, child sets a timer for the amount of time she thinks she needs, no destruction of the space.
5. **Taking time out can also happen anywhere for you and your child.** The simple actions of stepping outside, eating or drinking something, sitting in the car, exercising, deep breathing, playing with a pet are all that's needed at times to shift out of a heated moment.

# Guidelines for using Positive Time-Out



- ◆ Positive Time-out is NOT the only effective discipline tool. It is not appropriate for every behavior with every child, all the time.
- ◆ Allow children to choose Time Out. If, in the heat of the moment, your child storms off to their time-out spot before the issue is resolved, let him go rather than force the issue in the moment.  
Or you can suggest time-out to your child. “Do you think it would help you to go to the time-out spot now?” If the answer is no, “Would it help you if I went with you?” If the answer is still no, you may want to say, “Well, I think I will go. I think it will help me.”
- ◆ Follow through after time out. This means that the issue at hand is not forgotten but is respectfully addressed once the emotions have cooled. Parents can say, “You look calmer. Can we hug? Are you ready to clean up the blocks that you threw?”

Often Positive Time-out is enough to change the behavior, and isn't that the point? Positive Discipline encourages parents to move away from investing in making children pay for what they did wrong and move towards helping them make a change in their behavior for the future.

## Key Steps

- **Remember, the worst time to resolve issues are when people are angry.**
- **Explain the purpose of a positive time-out spot to your 2 ½ year old and up.**
- **Create the spot together.**
- **Set up guidelines for usage.**
- **Child has the choice to go to a calming area; parent also has the choice to go alone; or child can be respectfully walked there together.**
- **Follow-through by addressing the issue after time-out time.**
- **Time-outs can happen anywhere, it doesn't always have to involve a designated spot.**
- **Trust the process.**
- **Focus on what you will do to help yourself in angry moments, not what you will MAKE your child do. Adults need time-outs more often than children!**
- **Remember, taking time out doesn't reward children or let them get away with anything; it makes space for respectful resolutions to be reached.**

## Going Deeper

As parents, we focus on our child's misbehavior. We often neglect to look at our own tone of voice, facial expression, attitude, and choice of words. When we reach those moments when phrases like these are coming out of our mouth:

“I'm warning you.”

“I'm not going to tell you again.”

“One!... Two!... Three!”

this is the perfect time to recognize that you are the one who needs the Positive Time-Out the most. We are often escalating the tension and prolonging the conflict through angry, shaming outbursts.

When we find ourselves locked in a heated battle heading towards a hurtful outcome, this is a great time to take the opportunity to model taking responsibility for yourself. Stop talking, tune in and ask:

“How is my breathing and my heart rate?”

“Is there tension in my body?”

“Am I scrambling for control instead of looking for a win/win solution?”

“Is this something I can come back to later when emotions have cooled?”

Modeling the proper use of Positive Time-Out as a means of anger management and self-care will be the best thing you can do for yourself while providing powerful lessons for your children.

Positive Discipline Community Resources

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