

## **How to Use Time-Out Effectively**

### **Time-Out Area**

The time-out area should be easily accessible, and in such a location that the child can be easily monitored while in time-out. For example, if most activity takes place on the first floor of the house, the time-out area should not be on an upper floor. A chair in the corner of the dining room is an excellent spot. Placing a kitchen timer on the table is a good way to keep the child informed of how much time he has left to serve.

### **Amount of Time Spent in Time-Out**

Generally, it is considered more effective to have short periods of time-out, 5 to 10 minutes, rather than to have long periods, such as half an hour to an hour. Children from 2 - 5 years old should receive a 2 to 5 minute time-out. A 6-year-old child should probably receive about a 5-minute time-out while a 10-year-old child would receive a 10-minute time-out. A general guideline can be: 6-8 years of age, 5 minutes; 8-10 years of age, 10 minutes; 10-14 years of age, 10 to 20 minutes. (Note: ADHD children may benefit from shorter times than those suggested above).

### **Specifying Target Behaviors**

It is very important the child be aware of the behaviors that are targeted for reduction. They should be very concretely defined: for example, hitting means striking someone else with the hand or an object, or coming home late means arriving home any time after 5:00 p.m.

### **Procedures for Time-Out**

- When a child is told to go into time-out, a parent should only say, "Time-out for..." and state the particular offense. There should be no further discussion.
- Use a kitchen timer with a bell. Set the timer for the length of the time-out and tell the child he/she must stay in time-out until the bell rings.
- While in time-out, the child should not be permitted to talk, and the parent should not communicate with the child in any way. The child also should not make noises in any way, such as mumbling or grumbling. He or she should not be allowed to play with any toy, to listen to the radio or stereo, watch television, or bang on the furniture. Any violation of time-out should result in automatic resetting of the clock for one more time-out period.
- It is important that all members of the household be acquainted with the regulations for time-out, so that they will not interfere with the child in time-out in any way, for example, by turning on the radio.

### **Strategies for Handling Refusal or Resistance**

- While time-out works well, it can only work when the child actually serves the time-out. There are a number of ways to handle refusal. None of them will work with all children. You may have to experiment to determine which one will work for your child.
- Tell younger children that you will count to three and if they are not in time-out when you get to three the time-out will be doubled.

- Very difficult children, such as those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder, may need to be placed on a short reward program. This could include a chart with 20 to 30 squares. Each time a child does a time-out, the child gets a star or sticker on the chart. When the chart is full, they can earn a special treat for learning how to do time-out.
- Use response cost. Select an activity or object you can take away. Tell the child that until they do the time-out, they will not be able to use the object or engage in the activity. For instance, you can remove the cord from the TV and tell them that they may not watch TV or play a video game until they do the time-out.

### **Alternatives to Time-Out**

Children age 10 and over may decide they are "too big" for time-out because "it is for babies." Here are some other negative consequences that have been successful in reducing inappropriate behavior.

Tell the child that each time he displays the inappropriate behavior, he will have to write sentences to remind him of how he should behave. For instance, every time you talk back you will have to write, "I will talk nicely and show respect to my parents." The first time this happens on a given day the sentence is written 5 times. If this does not help them remember, then the next time the sentence is written 10 times. The number is increased by 5 or doubled (depending on the age of the child) each time the behavior occurs on that day. The next day the first occurrence receives 5 sentences.

Remove privileges or objects that you can control. Make a list of privileges or objects (TV, ride bike, stay up late, go outside and play, etc.). Tell the child that each time the undesirable behavior occurs, one item will be crossed off the list for that day. Each day the procedure starts over.

### **Advantages of Time Out**

- It is less aversive than other procedures, such as physical punishment.
- It eliminates a lot of yelling and screaming on the part of the parents.
- It increases the probability that parents are going to be consistent about what is going to be punished, when and how.
- The child learns to accept his own responsibility for undesirable behavior. The parents are not punishing the child; rather the child is punishing himself. The child should be repeatedly told that the parents did not put him or her in time-out but that the child put himself in time-out.
- The child more readily learns to discriminate which behaviors are acceptable and which are unacceptable.
- The child begins to learn more self-control.
- By keeping a written record of time-outs, parents can see if the procedure is reducing the targeted behavior. Also, reward can be tied to only receiving a certain amount of time-outs in a day or a smaller time period.