

## DISCIPLINE BASICS

The first goal of discipline is to protect your child from danger. Another important goal is to teach your child an understanding of right from wrong. Reasonable limit setting keeps us from raising a "spoiled" child. To teach respect for the rights of others, first teach your child to respect your rights. Begin external controls by 6 months of age. Children don't start to develop internal controls (self-control) until 3 or 4 years of age. They continue to need external controls, in gradually decreasing amounts, through adolescence.

### GUIDELINES FOR SETTING RULES

1. Begin discipline after 6 months of age. Young infants don't need any discipline. By the time they crawl, all children need rules for their safety.
2. Express each misbehavior as a clear and concrete rule. Examples of clear rules are "Don't push your brother" and "Don't interrupt me on the telephone."
3. Also state the acceptable or appropriate behavior. Your child needs to know what is expected of him. Examples are "Play with your brother," "Look at books when I'm on the telephone," or "Walk, don't run."
4. Ignore unimportant or irrelevant misbehavior. Avoid constant criticism. Behavior such as swinging the legs, poor table manners, or normal negativism is unimportant during the early years.
5. Use rules that are fair and attainable. A child should not be punished for behavior that is part of normal emotional development, such as thumb sucking, fears of being separated from the parents, and toilet-training accidents.
6. Concentrate on 2 or 3 rules initially. Give highest priority to issues of safety, such as not running into the street, and to the prevention of harm to others. Of next importance is behavior that damages property. Then come all the annoying behavior traits that wear you down (such as tantrums or whining).
7. Avoid trying to change "no-win" behavior through punishment. Examples are wetting pants, pulling their own hair, thumb sucking, body rocking, masturbation, not eating enough, not going to sleep, and refusal to complete schoolwork. The first step in resolving such a power struggle is to withdraw from the conflict and stop punishing your child for the misbehavior. Then give your child positive feedback when he behaves as you'd like.
8. Apply the rules consistently. After the parents agree on the rules, it may be helpful to write them down and post them.

### DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES (INCLUDING CONSEQUENCES)

1. Techniques to use for different ages are summarized here. The techniques mentioned here are further described after this list:
  - From birth to 6 months: no discipline necessary
  - From 6 months to 3 years: structuring the home environment, distracting, ignoring, verbal and nonverbal disapproval, physically moving or escorting, and temporary time-out
  - From 3 years to 5 years: the preceding techniques (especially temporary time-out) plus natural consequences, restricting places where the child can misbehave, and logical consequences
  - From 5 years to adolescence: the preceding techniques plus delay of a privilege, "I" messages, and negotiation via family conferences
  - Adolescence: logical consequences, "I" messages, and family conferences about house rules; time-out and manual guidance (see below) can be discontinued
2. Structure the home environment. You can change your child's surroundings so that an object or situation that could cause a problem is eliminated. Examples are installing gates, locks, and fences to protect the child.
3. Distracting your child from misbehavior. Distracting a young child from temptation by attracting his attention to something else is especially helpful when the child is in someone else's house or a store (e.g., distract with toys, food, or games).
4. Ignore the misbehavior. Ignoring helps to stop unacceptable behavior that is harmless—such as tantrums, sulking, whining, quarreling, or interrupting.
5. Use verbal and nonverbal disapproval. Mild disapproval is often all that is required to stop a young child's misbehavior. Get close to your child, get eye contact, look stern, and give a brief "no" or "stop."
6. Physically move or escort ("manual guidance"). Manual guidance means that you move a child from one place to another (e.g., to bed, bath, car, or time-out chair) against his will and help him as much as needed (e.g., carrying).
7. Use temporary time-out or social isolation. Time-out is the most effective discipline technique available to parents. Time-out is used to interrupt unacceptable behavior by removing the child from the scene to a boring place, such as a playpen,

corner of a room, chair, or bedroom. Time-outs should last about 1 minute per year of age and not more than 5 minutes.

8. Restrict places where a child can misbehave. This technique is especially helpful for behavior problems that can't be eliminated. Allowing nose picking and masturbation in your child's room prevents an unnecessary power struggle.
9. Use natural consequences. Your child can learn good behavior from the natural laws of the physical world; for example, not dressing properly for the weather means your child will be cold or wet, or breaking a toy means it isn't fun to play with anymore.
10. Use logical consequences. These should be logically related to the misbehavior, making your child accountable for his problems and decisions. Many logical consequences are simply the temporary removal of a possession or privilege if your child has misused the object or right.
11. Delay a privilege. Examples of work before play are "After you clean your room, you can go out and play" or "When you finish your homework, you can watch television."
12. Use "I" messages. When your child misbehaves, tell your child how you feel. Say, "I am upset when you do such and such." Your child is more likely to listen to this than a message that starts with "you." "You" messages usually trigger a defensive reaction.
13. Negotiate and hold family conferences. As children become older they need more communication and discussion with their parents about problems. A parent can begin such a conversation by saying, "We need to change these things. What are some ways we could handle this? What do you think would be fair?"
14. Temporarily discontinue any physical punishment. Most out-of-control children are already too aggressive. Physical punishment teaches them that it's acceptable to be aggressive (e.g., hit or hurt someone else) to solve problems.
15. Discontinue any yelling. Yelling and screaming teach your child to yell back; you are thereby legitimizing shouting matches. Your child will respond better in the long run to a pleasant tone of voice and words of diplomacy.
16. Don't forget to reward acceptable (desired) behaviors. Don't take good behavior for granted. Watch for behavior you like, and then praise your child. At these times, move close to your child, look at him, smile, and be affectionate. A parent's attention is the favorite reward of most children.

#### **RECOMMENDED READING**

Edward R. Christophersen: *Little People*. Westport Publishers, Kansas City, Mo., 1988.

Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay: *Parenting Young Children*. American Guidance Service, Circle Pines, Minn., 1990.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR GIVING CONSEQUENCES (PUNISHMENTS)**

1. Be unambivalent. Mean what you say and follow through.
2. Correct with love. Talk to your child the way you want people to talk to you. Avoid yelling or using a disrespectful tone of voice. Correct your child in a kind way. Sometimes begin your correction with "I'm sorry I can't let you. . ."
3. Apply the consequence immediately. Delayed punishments are less effective because young children forget why they are being punished. Punishment should occur very soon after the misbehavior and be administered by the adult who witnessed the misdeed.
4. Make a one-sentence comment about the rule when you punish your child. Also restate the preferred behavior, but avoid making a long speech.
5. Ignore your child's arguments while you are correcting him. This is the child's way of delaying punishment. Have a discussion with your child at a later, more pleasant time.
6. Make the punishment brief. Take toys out of circulation for no more than 1 or 2 days. Time-outs should last no longer than 1 minute per year of the child's age and 5 minutes maximum.
7. Follow the consequence with love and trust. Welcome your child back into the family circle and do not comment on the previous misbehavior or require an apology for it.
8. Direct the punishment against the misbehavior, not the person. Avoid degrading comments such as "You never do anything right."



#### **CALL OUR OFFICE**

##### ***During regular hours if:***

- Your child's misbehavior is dangerous.
- The instances of misbehavior seem too numerous to count.
- Your child is also having behavior problems at school.
- Your child doesn't seem to have many good points.
- Your child seems depressed.
- The parents can't agree on discipline.
- You can't give up physical punishment. (Note: Call immediately if you are afraid you might hurt your child.)
- The misbehavior does not improve after 1 month of using this approach.

Michael Popkin: *Active Parenting*. Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1987.

Jerry Wyckoff and Barbara C. Unell: *Discipline Without Spanking or Shouting*. Meadowbrook, Deephaven, Minn., 1984.

# STUBBORN TODDLERS

## DEFINITION

Negativism is a normal phase most children go through between 18 months and 3 years of age. It begins when children discover they have the power to refuse other people's requests. They respond negatively to many requests, including pleasant ones. In general, they are stubborn rather than cooperative. They delight in refusing a suggestion, whether it's about getting dressed or taking off their clothes, taking a bath or getting out of the bathtub, going to bed or getting up. Unless understood, this behavior can become extremely frustrating for parents. Handled appropriately, it lasts about 1 year.

## DEALING WITH A NEGATIVE, STUBBORN TODDLER

Consider the following guidelines for helping you and your child through this phase.

1. **Don't take this normal phase too personally.** By "no" your child means "Do I have to?" or "Do you mean it?" A negative response should not be confused with disrespect. Also, it is not meant to annoy you. This phase is critical to the development of independence and identity. Try to look at it with a sense of humor and amazement.
2. **Don't punish your child for saying "no."** Punish your child for what she does, not what she says. Since saying "no" is not something you control, ignore it. If you argue with your child about saying "no," you will probably prolong this behavior.
3. **Give your child plenty of choices.** This is the best way to increase your child's sense of freedom and control, so that she will become more cooperative. Examples of choices are letting your child choose between a shower or a bath; which book to read; which toys to take into the tub; which fruit to eat for a snack; which clothes or shoes to wear; which breakfast cereal to eat; and which game to play, whether inside or outside, in the park or in the yard. For tasks your child doesn't like, give her a say in the matter by asking, "Do you want to do it slowly or fast?" or "Do you want me to do it, or you?" The more quickly your child gains a feeling that she is a decision maker, the sooner she will become cooperative.
4. **Don't give your child a choice when there is none.** Safety rules, such as sitting in the car seat, are not open to discussion, although you can explain why the rule must be followed. Going to bed or to day care also is not negotiable. Don't ask a question when there's only one acceptable answer, but direct your child in as kind a way as possible (e.g., "I'm sorry, but now you have to go

to bed."). Commands such as "do this or else" should be avoided.

5. **Give transition time when changing activities.** If your child is having fun and must change to another activity, she probably needs a transition time. For example, if your child is playing with trucks as dinnertime approaches, give her a 5-minute warning. A kitchen timer sometimes helps a child accept the change better.
6. **Eliminate excessive rules.** The more rules you have, the less likely it is that your child will be agreeable about following them. Eliminate unnecessary expectations and arguments about wearing socks or cleaning her plate. Help your child feel less controlled by having more positive interactions than negative contacts each day.
7. **Avoid responding to your child's requests with excessive "no's."** Be for your child a model of agreeableness. When your child asks for something and you are unsure, try to say "yes" or postpone your decision by saying "Let me think about it." If you are going to grant a request, do so right away, before your child whines or begs for it. When you must say "no," tell your child that you're sorry and give your child a reason.



## CALL OUR OFFICE

*During regular hours if:*

- You or your spouse can't accept your child's need to say "no."
- You or your spouse have trouble controlling your temper.
- Your child has several other discipline problems.
- This approach doesn't bring improvement within 1 month.
- You have other questions or concern.

# TIME-OUT TECHNIQUE FOR DISCIPLINE

## DEFINITION

Time-out consists of immediately isolating a child in a boring place for a few minutes whenever she misbehaves. Time-out is also called quiet time, thinking time, or cooling-off time. Time-out has the advantage of providing a cooling-off period to allow both child and parent to calm down and regain control of their emotions.

Used repeatedly and correctly, the time-out technique can change almost any childhood behavior. Time-out is the most effective consequence for toddlers and preschoolers who misbehave—much better than threatening, shouting, or spanking. Every parent needs to know how to give time-out.

Time-out is most useful for aggressive, harmful, or disruptive behavior that cannot be ignored. Time-out is unnecessary for most temper tantrums. Time-out is not needed until a child is at least 8 months old and beginning to crawl. Time-out is rarely needed for children younger than 18 months because they usually respond to verbal disapproval. The peak ages for using time-out are 2 to 4 years. During these years children respond to action much better than to words.

## CHOOSING A PLACE FOR TIME-OUT

- **A time-out chair.** When a chair is designated for time-out, it gives time-out a destination. The chair should be in a boring location, facing a blank wall or a corner. Don't allow your child to take anything with her to time-out, such as a toy, pacifier, security blanket, or pet. The child shouldn't be able to see television or other people from the location. A good chair is a heavy one with side arms: Placed in a corner, such a chair surrounds the child with boundaries, leaves a small space for the legs, and reduces thoughts of escape. Alternatives to chairs are standing in a particular corner, sitting on a particular spot on the floor, or being in a playpen (if the child is not old enough to climb out of it).

Usually the chair is placed in an adjacent hallway or room. Some children less than 2 years old have separation fears and need the time-out chair (or playpen) to be in the same room as the parent. When you are in the same room as your child, carefully avoid making eye contact with the child.

- **A time-out room.** Children who refuse to stay in a time-out chair need to be sent to a time-out room. Confinement to a room is easier to enforce. The room should be one that is safe for the child and contains no valuables. The child's bedroom is often the most convenient and safe place for time-out. Although toys are available in the

bedroom, the child does not initially play with them because he or she is upset about being excluded from mainstream activities. Forbid turning on the radio, stereo, or video games during time-out in the bedroom. Avoid any room that is dark or scary (such as some basements), contains hot water (bathrooms), or has filing cabinets or bookshelves that could be pulled down on the child.

- **Time-out away from home.** Time-out can be effectively used in any setting. In a supermarket, younger children can be put back in the grocery cart and older children may need to stand in a corner. In shopping malls, children can take their time-out sitting on a bench or in a restroom. Sometimes a child needs to be taken to the car and made to sit on the floor of the back seat for the required minutes. If the child is outdoors and misbehaves, you can ask her to stand facing a tree.

## HOW TO ADMINISTER TIME-OUT

- **Deciding the length of time-out.** Time-out should be short enough to allow your child to have many chances to go back to the original situation and learn the acceptable behavior. A good rule of thumb is 1 minute per year of age (with a maximum of 5 minutes). After age 6, most children can be told they are in time-out "until you can behave," allowing them to choose how long they stay there. If the problem behavior recurs, the next time-out should last the recommended time for their age. Setting a portable kitchen timer for the required number of minutes is helpful. The best type ticks continuously and rings when the time is up. A timer can stop a child from asking the parents when he or she can come out.
- **Sending your child to time-out.** Older children will usually go to time-out on their own. Younger children often need to be led there by their wrist, or in some cases carried there protesting. If your child doesn't go to time-out within 5 seconds, take her there. Tell your child what she did wrong in one sentence (such as, "No hitting"). If possible, also clarify the preferred behavior (such as, "Be kind to George"). These brief comments give your child something to think about during the time-out.
- **Requiring quiet behavior in time-out.** The minimum requirement for time-out completion is that your child does not leave the chair or time-out place until the time-out is over. If your child leaves ahead of time, reset the timer. Some parents do not consider a time-out to be

completed unless the child has been quiet for the entire time. However, until 4 years of age, many children are unwilling or unable to stay quiet.

Ignore tantrums in time-out, just as you should ignore tantrums outside of time-out. After age 4, quiet time is preferred but not required. You can tell your child, "Time-out is supposed to be for thinking, and to think you've got to be quiet. If you yell or fuss, the time will start over."

- **Dealing with room damage.** If your child makes a mess in his room (e.g., empties clothing out of drawers or takes the bed apart), she must clean it up before she is released from time-out. Toys that were misused can be packed away. Some damage can be prevented by removing any scissors or crayons from the room before the time-out begins.
- **Releasing your child from time-out.** To be released, your child must have performed a successful time-out. This means she stayed in time-out for the required number of minutes. Your child can leave time-out when the timer rings. If you don't have a timer, she can leave when you tell her, "Time-out is over. You can get up now." Many parents of children over 4 years old require their children to be quiet at the end of time-out. If a child is still noisy when the timer rings, it can be reset for 1 minute.

#### BACK-UP PLANS

- **The younger child who refuses to stay in time-out.** In general, if a child escapes from time-out (gets up from the chair or spot), you should quickly take the child back to time-out and reset the timer. This approach works for most children. If a child refuses to stay in time-out, the parent should take action rather than arguing or scolding the child. You may temporarily need to hold a strong-willed, 2- or 3- year-old child in time-out. Holding your child in time-out teaches your child that you mean what you say and that she must obey you. Place your child in the time-out chair and hold her by the shoulders from behind. Tell your child that you will stop holding her when she stops trying to escape. Then avoid eye contact and any more talking. Pretend that you don't mind doing this and are thinking of something else or listening to music. Your child will probably stop trying to escape after a week of this approach.

A last resort for young children who continue to resist sitting in a chair is putting them in the bed: room with a gate blocking the door.

Occasionally a parent with carpentry skills can install a half-door. If you cannot devise a barricade, then you can close the door. You can hold the door closed for the 3 to 5 minutes it takes to complete the time-out period. If you don't want to hold the door, you can put a latch on

the door that allows it to be temporarily locked. Most children need their door closed only two or three times.

- **The older child who refuses to stay in time-out.** An older child can be defined in this context as one who is too strong for the parent to hold in a time-out chair. In general, any child older than 5 years who does not take time-out quickly should be considered a refuser. In such cases the discipline should escalate to a consequence that matters to the child. First, you can make the time-out longer, adding 1 extra minute for each minute of delay. Second, if 5 minutes pass without your child going to time-out, your child can be grounded. "Grounded" is defined as no television, radio, stereo, video games, toys, telephone access, outside play, snacks, or visits with friends. After grounding your child, walk away and no longer talk to her. Your child becomes "un-grounded" only after she takes her regular time-out plus the 5 minutes of penalty time. Until then, her day is very boring. If your child refuses the conditions of grounding, she can be sent to bed 15 minutes earlier for each time she breaks the grounding requirements. The child whose behavior doesn't improve with this approach usually needs to be evaluated by a mental health professional.

#### PRACTICING TIME-OUT WITH YOUR CHILD

If you have not used time-out before, go over it with your child before you start using it. Tell your child it will replace spanking, yelling, and other forms of discipline. Review the kinds of negative behavior that will lead to placement in time-out. Also review the positive behavior that you would prefer. Then pretend with your child that he has broken one of the rules. Take him through the steps of time-out so he will understand your directions when you send him to time-out in the future. Also teach this technique to your babysitter.

## TIME-OUT: WHEN IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE WORKING

### DEFINITION

Some parents become discouraged with time-out. Their child repeats misbehavior immediately after release from time-out. Some children refuse to go to time-out or won't stay there. None of these examples means that time-out should be abandoned. It remains the best discipline technique for 2- to 5-year-old children. If you use time-out repeatedly, consistently, and correctly, your child will eventually improve. The following recommendations may help you fine-tune how you are using time-out.

1. **Give your child more physical affection each day.** Be sure your child receives two time-ins for every time-out each day. A time-in is a positive, close, brief human interaction. Try to restore the positive side of your relationship with your child. Catch him being good. Try to hold your child for 1 or 2 minutes every 15 minutes when he is not in time-out or misbehaving. Play with your child more. Children who feel neglected or overly criticized don't want to please their parents.
2. **Use time-out every time your child engages in the behavior you are trying to change (target behavior).** Use time-out more frequently. For the first 2 or 3 days you may need to use time-outs 20 or more times a day to gain a defiant toddler's attention. Brief time-outs are harmless and there is no upper limit on how many times you can use them as long as you offset them with positive interactions.
3. **Use time-out.** Don't just threaten to use time-out. For aggressive behaviors, give no warnings; just put your child in time-out. Better yet, intercept your child when you see him starting to raise his arm or clench his fist and before he makes others cry. For other behaviors, remind your child of the rule, count to three, and if he doesn't stop immediately, put him in time-out.
4. **Put your child in time-out earlier.** Put your child in time-out before his behavior worsens. Your child is more likely to accept a time-out calmly if he's put in early rather than if he's put in late (and screaming). Also, putting him in early means you will be more in control of your emotions. Try to put your child in time-out before you become angry. If you are still yelling when you put your child in time-out, it will not work.
5. **Put your child in time-out quickly.** Don't talk about it first. When your child breaks a rule, have him in time-out within 10 seconds.
6. **Don't talk to your child during time-out.** Don't answer his questions or complaints. Don't try to lecture your child.
7. **Ignore tantrums in time-out.** Don't insist on quietness during time-out because it makes it harder to finish the time-out.
8. **Return your child to time-out if he escapes.** Have a back-up plan for further discipline, for example, holding a young child in the time-out chair or grounding an older child.
9. **Consider increasing the length of time-out.** If your child is over 3 years old and needs to be placed in time-out more than 10 times each day, a longer time-out may be needed to get his attention. A preschooler with a strong-willed temperament may temporarily need a time-out that lasts 2 or 3 minutes per year of his age. Children younger than 3 years should receive only brief time-outs (1 minute per year of age) because it is difficult for them to stay in time-out any longer.
10. **Make the time-out place more boring.** If your child doesn't seem to mind the time-outs, eliminate sources of entertainment. Move the time-out chair to a more boring location. If you use your child's bedroom, close the blinds or shades. Temporarily remove all toys and games from the bedroom and store them elsewhere.
11. **Use a portable timer for keeping track of the time.** Your child is more likely to obey a timer than to obey you.
12. **Be kinder in your delivery of time-out.** This will help reduce your child's anger. Say you're sorry he needs a time-out, but be firm about it. Try to handle your child gently when you take him to time-out.
13. **Praise your child for taking a good time-out.** Forgive your child completely when you release him from time-out. Don't give lectures or ask for an apology. Give your child a clean slate and don't tell his father or relatives how many time-outs he needed that day.
14. **Don't punish your child for the normal expression of anger.** If he is saying angry things or looking angry, don't be too alarmed. Don't try to control your child too much.
15. **Give your child more choices about how he takes his time-out.** Ask, "Do you want to take a time-out by yourself or do you want me to hold you in your chair? It doesn't matter to me." (For older children, the choice can be, "By yourself or do you want to be grounded?")
16. **Give your child the option of coming out of time-out as soon as he is under control rather than taking the specified number of minutes.** Some children feel overly controlled.

17. **Use a variety of consequences for misbehavior.** Ignore harmless behaviors. Also use distraction for bad habits. Use logical consequences such as removal of toys, other possessions, or privileges for some misbehavior.
18. **Clarify with your child what you want him to do.** Also clarify the house rules. Review this at a time when your child is in a good mood. This will help him be more successful.
19. **Use time-out with siblings when appropriate.** If siblings touch the timer or tease the child in time-out, they should also be placed in time-out.
20. **Teach all caretakers to use time-out correctly and consistently.**