



Tips on Time-Out

Sometimes kids do things that are unsafe, harmful, or hurtful, including aggression, darting/running off, breaking things, or regularly not listening to adults. When done right, Time-Out can be a good way to help kids learn that these types of behaviors are not okay and to do them less over time. You can watch a video on this topic at this [link](#) or by scanning the above QR code with your mobile device.

The Key to Effective Time-Outs

- **Make it boring.** Time-Out is about creating a specific type of experience right after kids misbehave. It means removing anything fun or interesting right away (including attention). The point of Time-Out is to make things as *boring* as possible as *quickly* as possible.
 - Time-Out should happen away from activities and items like screens, toys, and books. It should be in a place parents can monitor but don't have to hover. For some families, entryways, hallways, dining areas, or quiet corners work well. For toddlers, on the floor turned away often works just fine.
 - Try to use a space that makes it clear where the child needs to stay. For example, use a chair or small rug on the floor.

Starting Time-Out

- **Label misbehavior.** Right after doing something dangerous or aggressive, the child should be briefly told why they are being put in Time-Out. Then, try to say nothing else and avoid arguing.
 - Example: "You hit, now you have to go to Time-Out."
 - Note: If a child is being sent to Time-Out for not listening, it's okay to give one warning such as, "If you don't pick up those toys like I told you, you're going to Time-Out." Wait a short time (about 10 seconds) to see if they listen. If not, a parent can say, "You didn't listen, you have to go to Time-Out."
- **Place in boring spot quickly.** Immediately and gently, take your child to Time-Out by gently taking the child to the boring spot. Once the child is in the Time-Out, quickly walk away or turn your back.
- **Ignore attempts to avoid Time-Out.** Ignore any whining, negotiating, fussing, yelling, or continued aggression from your child. They may try several ways to get a reaction from you.
 - Remember, Time-Out need to be boring to work. Your attention is very interesting to kids, so any attention at this point makes it so that Time-Out is not boring.

During Time-Out

- **Keep Time-Out boring.** Kids will try to end Time-Out by crying, screaming, pleading, threatening, cajoling, and everything else. You should ignore all of this behavior, because if parents talk to their kids during Time-Out, it's not boring enough. *Don't respond to your child in any way* until Time-Out is over.

- **If Kids Get Up.** Some kids will try to escape from Time-Out before their time is up. If this happens, try to keep things boring and help your child learn they need to serve the Time-Out before they can go back to usual activities.
 - For preschool-aged children, parents should keep putting their child back into Time-Out when the child gets up or tries to run away. Try to do this without saying anything or making eye contact. This shows that Time-Out is going to happen no matter what, and eventually your child will learn to stay in Time-Out.
 - For school aged kids, you can try restricting a privilege (e.g., losing screen time for the day) or extending the total time of Time-Out.
 - If children are being very difficult to control, try using a “backup space.” This is an area you can take them to that is safe until they calm down. Once they have calmed, go back to the original Time-Out spot and start again. No matter what, they still need to do the Time-Out.

Ending Time-Out

- **Length of Time-Out.** For preschoolers, 2 minutes is fine. For older kids, about 5 minutes usually works well. Making Time-out much longer usually won't help.
 - When first using Time-Out, or if kids are having a hard time staying in Time-Out, a shorter length is okay, but it may not work as well until you can make it longer.
 - Parents are in-charge of when Time-Out ends, not the child.
- **Calm and cooperative.** Time-Out can be over when time is up *and* the child is being cooperative. If they are still protesting when time runs out, you should keep the Time-Out going until they are calm for at least 10 seconds.
- **Brief explanation.** Give a short description of why the Time-Out happened.
 - *Example:* “You went to Time-Out because you hit. Remember we don't hit because it hurts other people.”
- **Try again.** If your child earns Time-Out for not listening, give the same instruction again. Time-out is if they cooperate. Otherwise, start over.
- **Make some Time-In.** Time-Out is only effective if it contrasts with “Time-In,” the attention, stimulation, and fun your child normally gets. Look for some positive behavior to praise soon after the Time-Out is over. This helps get attention back on good behavior as quickly as possible.

Other Tips for Effective Time-Outs

- **Practice makes perfect.** During a neutral time, show your child what “good” Time-Out behavior looks like. Then, the child can practice showing that behavior and earn a praise for doing so.
- **Act unbothered.** While children are in Time-Out, parents should try to seem indifferent to misbehavior. The less reaction children get during Time-Out, the better. Try to act like a robot. You can look at a magazine, talk to another adult, etc.
- **Gradually expect more calm.** When first starting Time-Out, count the time that the child is sitting in the chair whether they are being totally calm or not. Once kids show they can stay in the chair, parents should gradually expect more and more “quiet” before kids can get up.
 - Some children sit quietly and don't speak while in Time-Out, while others may talk softly to themselves or fidget. This counts as being quiet and calm.
 - Others may be calming down from crying but haven't completely stopped. The sniffing that goes along with this should also be counted as quiet and calm.

Prep for Success

To get the most out of Time-Out, it's useful to think through all the steps in the process.

What behaviors will get Time-Out? Time-Out should be for more serious misbehavior that is dangerous or destructive, like hitting, running off, or breaking things, and not for "minor" misbehaviors like whining or back talk.

For my child, I will use Time-Out for the following behaviors (try to be very specific):

Where will Time-Out happen? Time-Out should happen in a boring place that is safe for the child.

For my child, Time-Out can happen in the following places:

How long will Time-out last?

What will you do if your child misbehaves during Time-Out? (Remember, be boring!)

If my child whines, cries, yells, or apologizes during Time-Out I will:

If my child gets up out of Time-Out, I will:

What is going to be hard about doing Time-Out? It will be easier to do Time-Out if you have thought about what might go wrong or be hard about it and what you plan to do.

What Will Go Wrong/Be Hard?	What Will I do About That?