



William J. Mesibov MD FAAP
Linda H. Jacobs MD FAAP

Stuart J. Altman MD FAAP
Lauren Brunn MD FAAP

Fellows American Academy of Pediatrics
575 Underhill Boulevard Syosset, New York 11791 516.921.2122 www.kidfixer.com

Time-out

What is a time out?

When your child is doing something that is unacceptable, time-out helps stop it and change the situation. Time-out sends him away from the trouble spot, and into an isolated area such as a room, chair, quiet corner, hallway, crib, or playpen. It's best used for children aged 2 through primary school years.

How can parents make time-out most effective?

- Give your child only one warning and avoid empty threats.
- Do not shout.
- When you're putting your child in time-out, briefly explain what he has done.
- Avoid long lectures.

Time-out will give your child quiet time to think about how he misbehaved and feel remorseful about it. Particularly in older preschoolers, time-out is a time of isolation and silence.

Send your child to the time-out chair or room. If he doesn't go there immediately, lead him by the hand or carry him. Time-out should be in a non-interesting, yet safe place. Your child should not be allowed to watch television, or interact with other people.

Time-out tips:

- Time-out should last one minute for each year of a child's age, up to 5 minutes.
- Help your child connect his behavior with the time.
- The TV should not be on during time-out.
- Keep time-out quiet.
- You should be the timekeeper.

- Clear the air when the time-out is over.

How long should time-out last?

Time-out should last one minute for each year of your child's age. It should not last for more than 5 minutes. You can use a kitchen timer. Make sure you put it where your child can see and hear it.

If your child leaves time-out, put him back quickly and reset the timer. This teaches him that you mean what you say. If your child repeatedly "escapes" from time-out, stand behind him and gently but firmly hold him in place. Do not argue or scream, but just quietly hold him there until his time is over.

What about other children?

If your other children touch the timer, or tease their brother or sister in time-out, they should be also placed in time-out.

How does time-out end?

Make it clear that you are in control of when time-out ends. Go to your child's corner and say, "Time-out is over. You can get up now." Clear the air. When time-out is over, it's over. Reminders or lectures after time-out may lead to the same misbehavior. It's better to comfort your child. But if your child repeats the behavior that led to the time-out in the first place, repeat the whole process.

Remember, your child should know that time-out is directed toward the misbehavior not him. It's important not to hurt your child's self-esteem by instilling shame, guilt, loss of trust, or feelings of abandonment.