

Using Time Out Effectively

Use time out appropriately

Time out is a useful tool to use for a slightly older toddler (from 2 years onwards) who uses a tantrum to openly defy your authority, or displays a behaviour that he knows is not acceptable (such as kicking the dog). Wait until he can understand that rules need to be followed, so that he will understand why time out is happening. Time out must not be seen as punishment. It should rather be seen as an opportunity to teach your toddler how to cope with his feelings of frustration and anger. Once he has learnt how to cope with these feelings, he will be able to start to modify his behaviour.

Cooling off

If your toddler is still young (1–2 years), start by taking time outs together. So when he starts to push beyond his borders and is getting hyped up, say, "Let's stop for a while, take a deep breath and have some quiet time together". This is a good way to get him used to a 'cooling off' period.

Time-out zone

Once your toddler is two years old, he will start to understand a bit more of action and consequence, as well as be able to follow instructions. This is the ideal time to start using more formal time out, if necessary. A good idea is to use his bedroom as the time-out zone. Remember that if he needs some time out in the first place, his sensory system is most likely overloaded, making him feel out of sorts and disorganised. His bedroom is a safe and secure zone that he is comfortable with, so it will comfort and calm him. Avoid using bathrooms or naughty corners. These areas may make him feel embarrassed, uncomfortable and insecure.

Be calm, but firm

When he needs some time out, tell him very firmly that you do not like what he is doing, and that he needs to go to his room. Try not to shout – all it does is reinforce a spiral of negative behaviour. Use your body language to reinforce how serious you are. Point towards the bedroom, and coax him along. Don't be tempted to smack. If he digs his heels in, pick him up firmly (even if he is kicking and screaming), and take him to his bedroom. Once you are there, say to him, "It's not nice to pinch your sister. Stay here until you feel better". Walk out and close the door. Because he is a toddler, he will weep and wail and may even bash on the door with frustration.

Go back to him

Wait for about a minute before you go back. Don't leave him for too long, but don't rush back in immediately – allow him some time to calm himself down. When you re-enter his room, take no notice of the mess that he may have caused; rather keep your voice calm and controlled. Suggest a cuddle on your lap. If he resists, say calmly, "OK, I will come back in a little while when you are feeling better". Leave the room for another minute. Go back in and repeat your offer. Continue in this way until he is ready for a hug and a cuddle. Sit on the floor, or his bed or a chair in his room, and hold him firmly with a deep hug. Singing a favourite song is also most useful. Wait until he is calm.

Name his feeling

Briefly discuss the event that caused the time out in the first place. Remember to always *acknowledge and name* how he is feeling by saying, "I know that you are feeling angry because I sent you to your room", then *mirror* the feeling by saying, "I would also feel angry if I were you", then *explain why he was sent to his room* by saying, "It wasn't very nice to pinch your sister. So remember that next time when you are feeling frustrated with her, pinching is not the way to deal with it". Suggest that he puts the 'bad thought' into a little box or an imaginary bubble, then go with him to the bedroom window and empty the box, or blow the bubble away. Offer to help him tidy up his room (if he has trashed it in his rage), then continue with your activities. Reassure him that time out doesn't mean that you don't love him, and that you will always love him no matter what. Don't refer to the episode again – not even when dad comes home from work – it is over. This method can be used up to school-going age.

Discipline in public places

Obviously time out will work if you are at home. But what if you are out? The best way to handle discipline when you are out is to remove your child from the situation. So if he is having a tantrum at the shopping centre, ignore him, and try to finish your shopping as quickly as possible and get out of there as fast as you can! Remember to be in tune to his

signals, so don't take him shopping if he is hungry, tired or over-stimulated – it is bound to end in tears. If you need to discipline your toddler in a public place, always take him to a quiet spot around the corner so that he does not feel embarrassed.

Avoid smacking

All smacking does is teach your child that violence and aggression are appropriate and acceptable ways to gain control. Smacking also reinforces negative behaviour by giving your child attention. If you are tempted to smack, rather take a deep breath and walk away.

By setting clear limits, and using discipline appropriately, this journey (and it is a fascinating one) on which you are both travelling, will ultimately foster a sense of independence in your toddler, whilst at the same time letting him work out what behaviours are acceptable, for example hugging another child, and which are not, for example pulling the dog's ears.

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