

Truths About Time-out

Time-out is the removal of a child from all types of reinforcement (e.g., parent attention, toys, screen time) for a specified, short period of time as a consequence for misbehavior (Kazdin, 2001). Decades of research show that, when used correctly, time-out is a safe, positive option to teach young children to behave well. Below are some common misperceptions about time-out, as well as some tips to make time-out more effective.

Myths about Time-out

- ❖ Myth 1: Time-out is harmful and undermines loving parenting.
Fact: When parents set age-appropriate limits, it helps children to learn positive behavior. Used correctly, time-out is a safe, effective way to help children to regulate their behavior.
- ❖ Myth 2: Time-out re-traumatizes children who have experienced abuse.
Fact: Time-out teaches children that even when they misbehave, parents will treat them respectfully and consistently.
- ❖ Myth 3: Time-out is just a way for a child to get out of doing the things a parent wants him/her to do.
Fact: When used correctly, time-out teaches children to obey more often and more quickly.

When is time-out effective?

Practicing the tips below will help parents to create more effective time-outs and ultimately improve children's behavior.

- ❖ Time-out is not an escape.
After a child sits in time-out, he/she should complete the task the parent originally asked him/her to do. If he/she is not willing to complete the task, then the child must return to time-out.
- ❖ Time-out works best with certain ages.
Time-out can be used most effectively with children between the ages of 2 and 7 years.
- ❖ Keep time-out short.
For children between the ages of 2 and 7, time-out does not need to exceed three minutes. However, make sure to end time-out only after the child is quiet for a few seconds. That way he/she will quickly learn that time-out ends only when he/she is calm and quiet.
- ❖ Time-out should be boring.
Time-out works because a child has nothing to interest him/her. Remove any fun or distracting objects from the time-out space and avoid giving a child any attention.
- ❖ Time-out should be in a safe environment.
Find a place where objects are out of reach. Make sure the time-out chair is safe. Parents should remain in a place where they are able to see their child in the chair, but should not make eye-contact.