

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.**

PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT (SPANKING)

The place of physical punishment in discipline is controversial. There are several good arguments for not using corporal punishment at all. We can raise children to be agreeable, responsible, productive adults without ever spanking them. All children need discipline on hundreds of occasions, but there are alternatives to spanking, such as redirecting (distracting) the child, taking away a privilege, or sending a child to her room. Spanking carries the risk of triggering the unrelated pent-up anger that many adults carry inside them. This anger could escalate the well-intentioned spanking and end in child abuse. Parents who turn to spanking as a last resort for "breaking their child's will" may find that they have underestimated their child's determination. In addition, physical punishment worsens aggressive behavior because it teaches a child to lash out when she is angry. Other forms of discipline can be more constructive, leaving a child with some sense of guilt and contributing to the formation of a conscience.

SAFE SPANKING

We would prefer that you not use spanking to discipline your children.

If you occasionally feel the need to spank your child, follow these guidelines for safe physical punishment:

- Always use other techniques (such as time-out) first. Use spanking only for behaviors that are dangerous or deliberately defiant of your instructions.
- Hit only with an open hand. Hit through clothing. It is difficult to judge how hard you are hitting your child if you hit her with an object other than your hand. Paddles and belts may cause bruises.
- Spanking should never leave more than temporary redness of the skin.
- Hit only on the buttocks, legs, or hands. Hitting a child on the face is demeaning as well as dangerous; in fact, slapping the face is inappropriate at any age. Your child could suddenly turn her head and the slap could damage her vision or hearing.
- Give only one swat; that is enough to change behavior. Hitting your child more than once may relieve your anger but will probably not teach your child anything additional.
- Don't spank children less than 18 months of age. Spanking is absolutely inappropriate before your child has learned to walk. Spanking should be unnecessary after the age of 6 years because you can use negotiation and discussion to resolve most differences with school-age children.
- Avoid shaking children, because of the serious risk of causing blood clots on the brain (subdural hematomas).
- Don't use physical punishment more than once each day. The more your child is spanked, the less effect it will have.
- Learn alternatives to physical discipline. Isolating a child in a corner or bedroom for a time-out is much more civilized and effective. Learn how to use other forms of discipline. Spanking should never be the main form of discipline a child receives.
- Never spank your child when you are out of control, scared, or drinking. A few parents can't stop hitting their child once they start. They can't control their rage and need help for themselves, such as from Parents Anonymous groups. They must learn to walk away from their children and never use physical punishment.
- Don't use physical punishment for aggressive misbehavior, such as biting, hitting, or kicking. Physical punishment under such circumstances teaches a child that it is all right for a bigger person to strike a smaller person. Aggressive children need to be taught restraint and self-control. They respond best to time-outs, which give them an opportunity to think about the pain they have caused. If you are not using time-outs, read more on how to make them work for you.
- Don't allow babysitters, child-care staff, and teachers to spank your children.