

TWU Counseling Center

Tips for Disciplining Your Child/Teen

“TIME OUTS”

When properly used “time out” teaches children a peaceful way of solving a problem. Spanking, on the other hand, leaves the child feeling angry. In addition, “time out” is good for both the child and parent. It teaches the child how to stop and think, and gives the parent time to “cool off” and not do anything they might regret.

“Time out” consists of immediately isolating the child in a boring place for a few minutes. Some parents call it “quiet time” or “thinking time.” For the young toddler, the best place for “time-out” is a playpen. Use the corner for older toddlers and preschoolers. Try to avoid the youngster’s bedroom whenever possible. Do not give your child something to do to occupy his or her time when in “time out.” This defeats your purpose. If your child cries or screams, ignore the behavior. Just because a child is not quiet during “time out” does not mean it is not working (perhaps that is what the child wants you to think!). One of the secrets of successful “time out” is ignoring the child all together. That means no eye contact, no conversation and definitely not being in the same room. Your child wants attention and when he or she doesn’t get it and consistently, he or she will realize this tactic doesn’t work with you.

Tips for Successful “Time Outs”

- First and foremost, give your child three “time ins” for every “time out” each day (see below). A “time in” is some personal interaction with your child, such as a hug, verbal praise, or a nice big smile. In other words, “catch your youngster being good.” Positive attention will always be more effective than negative attention. The more positive attention your child gets, the less likely he or she will misbehave and need a “time out.”
- Pick the situations or behaviors in which you plan to use the time out (hitting, pushing, etc.) and be consistent.
- When using “time out” for the first time, a strong-willed toddler may test your willpower by misbehaving more often to see what you will do. There is no upper limit on how many times you can use “time out” in a 24-hour period. However, each “time out” period should be age appropriate. A good rule of thumb is one minute per every year of age for your child (e.g., a five-year-old would get a 5-minute time out per every “time out” occurrence). A kitchen timer or the clock on the stove can be set for the required time. When the alarm goes off, “time out” is over. Go to your youngster and tell him/her, “you can get up now.” Then, wipe the slate clean. Do not remind him/her what he/she did wrong.
- Never threaten the use of “time out.” If you say “time out,” then put your child into “time out.” In order to be effective, there can be no more warnings or second chances! You must be consistent or your child will push the boundaries...guaranteed!
- Use “time out” immediately. “Time out” is more effective when used promptly after the child misbehaves. This keeps the bad behavior from escalating. Using “time out” immediately also keeps a parent from becoming too angry. The child gains control when the parent loses control!

- Do not end a “time out” early or let your child decide when he or she can be out of time out (e.g., when you can decide to be good you can get up).
- Don't worry if your child is not quiet during “time out.” Ignore the tantrums, noise making, complaining or begging (“I'll be good now.”)
- Finally, do not rely exclusively on “time out” for every infraction. Use other techniques besides “time out,” such as distraction, removal of toys, etc. And don't forget to ignore harmless misbehaviors you can accept. Children are far from perfect! It is important to have age appropriate expectations for your children (e.g., you can expect a teenager to be able to keep his or her room clean, but for younger children this may not be a realistic goal without help from you).

“TIME INS”

Time-out has become an extremely popular discipline technique. However, what determines the effectiveness of time-out or almost any other discipline technique is **time-in**. Time-in refers to the positive interactions and feedback children receive when they are not misbehaving. The quality of time-in is a critical determinant of the quality of the parent-child relationship. Children often see their parents as the people who set limits for them and punish them when they misbehave. It is also important for children to view their parents as people who offer a lot of positive attention. The following suggestions can help improve time-in.

Tips for Effective “Time-In”

- It is important that parents monitor their children's activities frequently. This will give parents a chance to observe more of their children's appropriate behaviors. The goal is to catch children being good. It will be less necessary to give “time outs,” if you are giving plenty of “time ins.” Giving your children positive attention helps reduce their need for negative attention.
- Parents should offer their children a lot of praise when they are behaving “ok.” Parents should not wait until their children do something extraordinary or perfectly to offer praise. Good enough is good enough. Don't expect perfection from your child. He or she is not capable of being perfect nor are you.
- When parents praise their children, it is often a good idea to tell them exactly why they are being praised. For example, “You did a great job of cleaning up your mess. Thank you.”
- In addition to verbal praise, parents should offer a lot of physical attention. For example, hugs, smiles, kisses, pats on the back, or winks. Young children respond especially well to physical affection. However it doesn't matter if your child is two or twenty-two, he or she needs affection in whatever way is culturally, morally, and legally comfortable and appropriate for you and your family.
- It is important to give children positive feedback immediately. Parents shouldn't wait until sometime after the good behavior occurs to offer the praise. Just as you want to call attention to bad behavior in the moment, it is also just as important to call attention to good behavior in the moment. Good behavior is easier to become complacent about. If you make more of an effort to recognize the positive in your child you will have less need to punish behaviors you don't want.

- It is important to avoid using roundabout compliments. For example, it is not a good idea to say something like "That's good; why can't you do that more often?" That is actually criticizing your child.
- Third-handed compliments can be very effective. Third-handed compliments occur when one person tells another person about children's good behavior in the children's presence. For example, when one parent comes home from work, the other parent talks about the child's good behavior that occurred that day.
- The use of a parent-child activity can be used to reward children's good behavior. For example, going to the park, playing a game, taking a teen to the mall, or letting him drive you in the car. The use of parent-child activities is often preferable to the use of material rewards and strengthens the positive relationship between you and your child.

GROUNDING

Grounding is a technique used by many parents as a discipline technique for their older children. It is a form of time out in that the child is removed from pleasurable activities for a period of time (e.g., watching TV, playing outside, driving the car, or losing computer or telephone privileges).

Tips for Successful Grounding

- Set a reasonable amount of time for grounding that is age appropriate for your child (e.g., you can ground a teenager from his or her car for a week, but to ground a 10-year old from playing outside for a week is probably not reasonable. When parents ground their children for long periods (e.g., several weeks or more) it often loses its effectiveness because there is typically little incentive for children to behave well during the grounding.
- Do not set a grounding limit when in anger. You will be more likely to give a time span that is inflated in regard to the "crime" your child or teen committed. Take the opportunity to calm yourself down and think about the behavior and decide on a reasonable time limit for the unwanted behavior.
- After you have set the time period for the grounding, do not change it. Often when parents ground children for a long period of time, they often give in and reduce the length of grounding because of the restraints it places on the whole family. When this happens, children learn their parents won't follow through with the grounding they impose.
- Define what grounding means and make your expectations clear. Write them down and post them if needed. One example of rules for grounding an older child might be expecting him or her to stay in one's own room (or an assigned room) except for attending school, eating meals, or performing chores. During the grounding there should be no television, no video games, no radio or tape players, no other games/toys, no visitors, no telephone calls, no snacks, no reading materials except school books, and no outside social activities.
- In order not to punish the entire family for the misbehavior of one child, make accommodations for that child if the family wished to go out. For example, if a family outing is scheduled, a sitter should be used so that the grounded child remains at home while the parents and other family members can still go on out.

Tips for Grounding the Older Child or Teenager

Modified grounding for an older child or teen involves brief and intense grounding. However, the child or teen is allowed the opportunity to earn his or her way off grounding by completing a job assignment. This technique is most appropriate for older children (e.g., 10-16 year olds).

- The first step in initiating the modified grounding technique is to sit down with your child or teen and develop a list of 10-15 jobs that often need to be done around the home. Do not sit down with your child to start this procedure at a time when your child is about to be punished. Choose a time when your child is behaving well to discuss the technique and to generate a list of jobs. These jobs should not be chores that your child is expected to do on a regular basis. These jobs should take a significant amount of time to complete (e.g., at least 1-2 hours). The jobs should also be things that your child is capable of doing. Examples of such jobs include washing the windows in the house, washing the car, giving the dog a bath, polishing the silverware, cleaning out the refrigerator, cleaning out the garage or attic, or cleaning the bathroom.
- The next step is to write each individual job on a separate index card. This description should include a very detailed description of exactly what is required to do the job satisfactorily. For example, cleaning the garage would involve removing all objects from the garage, removing cobwebs on the ceilings, sweeping the floor, hosing/scrubbing the floor, and replacing objects in an organized and neat fashion. If some jobs are relatively brief, it is possible to combine jobs together so that all cards have a job assignment that will take approximately the same total time to complete.
- After this list has been generated, your child should be told that when he or she misbehaves to the degree that grounding is necessary, this new discipline technique will be used. Immediately after the misbehavior has occurred, the child will be told he or she is grounded and an index card will be picked at random. The child will be completely grounded until that job has been completed to the parent's satisfaction. For particularly significant misbehavior, more than one card can be drawn.
- After your child has completed the assigned job(s) he or she should come to you so that his or her performance can be checked. If the job has been done well, it is important to briefly praise your child for the job performance and inform him or her that the grounding is over. If the job has not been completed satisfactorily, briefly provide feedback to your child on the aspects of the job that have been done well and those that need additional work. Be specific in what additional work needs to be done. Try to handle corrective feedback in a matter-of-fact manner without nagging, lecturing, or becoming upset.
- Using this modified grounding procedure, your child earns his or her way off grounding. Therefore, your child basically determines how long the grounding will last. Grounding may last anywhere from just a few hours to several days. If the grounding lasts more than several days, it is important to check to make sure your child is being appropriately grounded (e.g., they're not sneaking television/radio).
- This modified grounding procedure can be a very effective discipline technique for older children (e.g., 10-16 year olds). However, it is critical that parents also remember to frequently praise and give their children positive feedback when they are behaving well. As with any punishment technique, grounding will only be optimally effective when there is a positive and loving relationship between parents and their children.

POINT SYSTEMS

Point systems can be an effective way to reward good behaviors and diminish unwanted behaviors. Points can be awarded for good behavior and deducted for unwanted behavior. Children and teens can then exchange these points for privileges or activities. Point systems are appropriate for children 8 years old and older.

Tips for the Effective Use of a Point System

- Before instituting a point system, parents should discuss with their children what types of good behavior will earn points and what types of undesirable behavior will get points taken away. Details should be discussed beforehand such as how many points each behavior is worth and the exact expectations the parent has regarding each behavior. Expectations should be checked to ensure the expectations are reasonable and age appropriate. These expectations can be written down to check for accuracy and consistency.
- The highest values should be given to the behaviors parents and their children consider the most important and that occur the least. It is a good idea to assign higher values to desirable behaviors to "stack the deck" in the children's favor. The values subtracted for undesirable behaviors should be lower than the values added for good behavior. Low values should be placed on undesirable behaviors. Parents should assign higher values to behaviors of most potential harm to children and/or others, for example, aggression. Parents should assign relatively low values to minor, non-dangerous behaviors, such as verbal abuse or disruption. Parents should assign low values to behaviors that occur frequently to decrease the chance of children losing more points than they earn on a daily basis.
- Parents should make a list of some of their children's favorite items, privileges, events, and activities. Parents should make it clear how many points each activity will "cost" for the child/teen to partake in the desired privilege. These items should be things that the parent has control over. They should select events or items that can be given to their children as rewards on a daily basis with minimal effort. Parents should assign points to their children's preferred activities so that children are able to exchange points daily for one or more privileges. For example, a privilege should not cost seven points when desirable behaviors can only be earned in increments of five. When in doubt, parents should assign low values for privileges.
- Parents should allow their children to exchange all points earned on a daily basis. During daily accounting sessions, which should be scheduled in advance, parents should describe their children's performance, award points, and specify times for exchanges. At all other times, parents should not discuss these issues. This will minimize children's opportunities to gain reinforcement through manipulative behaviors.
- Parents should arrange daily bonus opportunities if the number of points children earn indicates that they are behaving better than the predetermined expected level.
- Parents should review the frequency at which earned points are exchanged for specific privileges. If one privilege is seldom selected, parents should talk to their children about this and replace it with another privilege. You want privileges that are highly desirable to your child to stimulate their good behavior and decrease their bad behavior.

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Sources: Multiple sources from www.KidsGrowth.com and the Center for Effective Parenting at www.parenting-ed.org