

# DOES TIME-OUT WORK?

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I was watching a parenting program on TV the other night and the coach was advocating the 'time-out' technique for an out of control 6 year-old girl. The mother was instructed to tell the child that time-out on the 'naughty cube' would result if she was disobedient. The inevitable happened and the child was marched to the designated spot. The mother sat the screaming girl on the cube, turned her back and walked away. What followed was a 3 1/2 hour battle of wills. The child refused to sit on the cube and would immediately jump off and run away or kick the cube away. Mother or father would retrieve her from under the table, down the hall, upstairs or around a corner, and without speaking to her (although a parent probably couldn't have been heard over the screaming), she was placed back on the cube. The parents would immediately walk away. Something was missing in this equation!

Time-out is a great technique to positively change negative child behavior. The idea behind it is to isolate the child from a favored activity for a given length of time so they can calm down and think about how they should behave before being allowed to return. If time-out doesn't change the negative behavior, something is wrong with the process. For effective correction the following aspects must be in place. Parents need to explain behavioral expectations clearly before any consequences occur. The child needs to look the parent in the eye and, once the expected behavior has been explained, repeat what the parent has said to prove they understand. The parent demonstrates the expected behavior and the child practices till they get it right.

Praise for desired behavior is vital. If the child does not comply, then time-out, as a consequence, should be explained and applied. By now the child knows exactly what will happen and is, therefore, making a choice for corrective action rather than obedience. Give the child one warning then take their hand and sit them on the designated time-out spot. Tell them why they are there and how long they need to stay before they can come back. Stay there for a moment to make sure the child does not move off the spot. If they get up sit them back immediately. If they refuse to sit on the seat, sit on the seat yourself and sit them in your lap facing forwards. Wrap both your arms around them, holding their hands. This is like a bear hug but they are facing away from you. Tell them you will not let them go until they stop crying or struggling. When they calm down, sit them on the seat and start the timer. The time should be one minute for each year e.g. A 4 year-old would be given a 4-minute time-out.

There are several reasons why time-out may not work. If you are not consistent with your expectations, kids are not convinced that you mean what you say and will often not comply. Time-out is only one of many corrective actions and should be substituted as the child gets beyond about eight years of

age, gets stale, or when desired results are not forthcoming. Reducing TV watching time or time on the computer, withdrawing privileges, taking away a skateboard, bike or car keys from a driving teenager are other methods of dealing with inappropriate behavior. For now, time-out for young children can still be a very effective tool if used effectively.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.