



Effective Discipline Strategies

Negative Consequences and Punishment: Time Out

A positive approach to parenting does not mean that parents never use negative consequences and punishment. Both are necessary to teach children what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Some parents get discouraged when their child misbehaves. They think, “This attention, praise and rewards stuff isn’t working!” Children will still break the rules—because they are learning, exploring and testing the limits of their world. A positive discipline approach includes positive parenting strategies AND tools to use when children misbehave.

Time Out

Tell your child they are going to time out immediately after the misbehavior.

Tip: For some behaviors, you might give a single warning. Briefly state the rule that was broken.

Direct your child to the time out area.

Tip: Take them to the location if needed. Make sure the time out area doesn’t provide opportunities for them to have fun or get too distracted. Don’t talk to them!

Set a timer and tell them they can get up when the timer goes off.

Tip: The length of the time out should match the child’s age in minutes. The time is NOT related to the severity of the offense or how upset you may be about the behavior.

Ignore whatever your child says or does during the time out — as long as they are safe and they stay in the time out area. Don’t talk to them or pay attention to them at all. The main idea is for the child to do as you ask. Don’t demand that the child be absolutely quiet or sit still during the time out—in fact, a child learning to soothe them-self by singing, rocking or even crying can be a helpful life skill. Again, the main point is that they stay where you told them to stay.

Tip: If your child tries to leave, calmly and WITHOUT TALKING return them to the time out area. Use your judgment about restarting the timer. If the child leaves the time out area again, stop the time out and take away a privilege. Work this out in advance with your child so that they know what the consequence will be. You may be tempted to increase the length or severity of the consequence because you are angry with your child for misbehaving. But remember, if you stay calm when frustrated you will be modeling for your child the same behavior you want from them. Let the consequence that you arranged do its work. Over time your child will learn that finishing the timeout makes the most sense for them. And most importantly they will learn that you mean what you say and you say what you mean.

When the timer goes off, thank your child for doing their time out.

Tip: Briefly remind them about the broken rule that resulted in the time out. Then change the subject.