

Chapter 13: "Using Time-Out"

Power of Positive Parenting by Dr. Glenn Latham

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"Time-out," a behavior management strategy known to nearly every parent, is one of the most misunderstood and badly used strategies for dealing with the inappropriate behavior of children. But when well understood, and well used, it is a wonderful tool for managing children's difficult behaviors. In this chapter, Dr. Latham makes the following points about time-out:

- The term time-out is really and abbreviation for **"time out from positive reinforcement."** Time out is an effective strategy only if the child is away from a reinforcing environment when in time-out.
- Often when dealing with inappropriate behavior of children, we become punitive: i.e., we forget about trying to shape behavior through the use of positive, reinforcing consequences, and instead come crashing down on kids with all kinds of negative, punitive, aversive kinds of consequences.
- Typically appropriate behavior goes totally unrecognized and unacknowledged. Then a child misbehaves and gets thrown into time-out.
- **Remember, behavior responds better to positive than to negative consequences.**
- Time out from positive reinforcement is intended to place the child in an environment where he is not getting any positive reinforcement. It should be so unreinforcing, in fact, that the child decides that it is better to behave appropriately and get positively reinforced than to behave inappropriately and be timed-out.
- Be careful... **Used badly, time-out can quickly become a reinforcer.** For example, if the child is supposed to be completing a distasteful task and is put in time-out because he is dawdling away his time, he had beaten the system: while in time-out, there are no expectations of him. Or, while the child is being taken to time-out, given all of the ceremony surrounding it, it becomes an immensely reinforcing event by bringing to the child the attention of everyone.
- The time-out area must be secure and totally unreinforcing. It must be a sterile, dull environment that does not offer the child the slightest opportunity to enjoy himself. It must not be frightening, dangerous, or physically threatening. It should be of a reasonable temperature, well lighted, but dull.

- When taking a child to and removing a child from time-out, use as few words as possible, and all physical interactions with the child must be as gentle as possible. This does not mean that the child is coddled. It is possible to be gentle and at the same time firm.
 - For example, you might say, "When you behave this way you may not be with us." Or, "When you're ready to behave nicely, you may be with us."
 - Do not apologize, go into long explanations, or say punitive comments.
 - Also, do not give extreme attention or go into long lectures once time-out is over

- Practice, practice, practice. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

- A child must not be allowed to leave time-out **until he has remained quiet for the required number of minutes**, depending upon the age of the child. Until age 3, use half a minute of time-out for every year old the child is. Three minutes is used for children 4 years old and older.
 - Children over 7 years old may need other management techniques.

- Monitoring while in time out... do not interrupt a child's crying, screaming and hollering to say something like, "When you decide to quiet down in there, then I will let you out!" This is a form of intermittent reinforcement that does nothing more than encourage the child to continue screaming, hollering, and carrying on.

- Role play the time-out procedure with a child, let the child know that you will start timing him once he is quiet, and that if he is quiet for two or three minutes (as appropriate) then he may leave time-out.

- If the child goes through the time-out process and then repeats the behavior once removed from time-out, don't try to convince the child he shouldn't have done that. Simply say your rehearsed saying/line, close the door and start the whole process over again.

- Both parents and children must have a clear understanding of which behaviors will be treated with time-out.

- Never threaten a child with time-out. If a child exhibits a behavior that is so severe as to require time-out, the child should be removed immediately to time-out.

* A good time-out area is a small price to pay for the good it can do!

* Be certain that when the child is not in time-out, he/she gets lots of positive attention for good behaviors.

- * Research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive or negative processes. ~ S.W. Bijou ~
- * Use the strategies for establishing a reinforcing environment in the home on p. 207.



Reflections

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1. On a typical day, what do you do (or what have you done in the past) when your child(ren) act inappropriately?

 2. What do you consider to be inappropriate behaviors?

 3. From your list of inappropriate behaviors, which 2 or 3 would be ones you just cannot ignore (ones that are not inconsequential, age appropriate behaviors)?

 4. If you have used time-out, how have your children responded to it?

 5. Where in your house do you think would be (or was) the best place for time-out?

 6. What concerns do you have about time-out?