

123 Time-Out Advantages and Disadvantages

By Judy Arnall

Time-out seems to be a popular discipline/punishment method. Parents need to be aware that it has risks for their child and their relationship. Although many parents claim it has “worked” they often mean that it has worked to gain compliance in the short-run. Long-run effects of this method, on the child and the parent-child relationship are listed under the disadvantages. What can parents do instead? There are many methods to getting children to calm down. Try Time-In instead. In Time-in, the parent assists the child in regaining self-control. They coach the child how to deep breathe, how to stop and take a minute to channel feelings at an object, or redirect their anger and frustration with physical outlets. Breathing, touch, hugs, soft words, and rocking will all help a child finish crying and be “ready” to listen – to teaching, comforting, encouragement and kind words of direction in what to do instead next time. With many repetitions, children soon learn that taking a time-out from the source of annoyance is a good coping strategy, rather than a punishment, and will repeat it themselves on their own.

Advantages of using Time-Out

- Puts limits on behaviours.
- Invites little adult emotion.
- Increases consistency.
- Simple to do.
- Helps parents to calm themselves down.
- Better than spanking and hitting.
- Transferable among care-givers.
- Developed for children with ADD.
- Sometimes attains “short-run” goals of stopping misbehaviour.

Disadvantages of Using Time-Out

- Promises “magic” and speed, which can be an unrealistic goal in parenting.
- Fails to address long-run goals of the child developing belonging and attachment with family.
- Teaches that time-out is a negative punishment rather than a positive life skill.
- Invites power struggles in keeping a child constrained in time-out.
- Encourages submission to a bigger-sized person.
- Fails to teach problem-solving and co-operation skills.
- Can incite anger, frustration, and resentment in the child.
- Can promote rebellion, retaliation, and getting-even behaviours from the child.
- Can increase sibling animosity when used to curb sibling conflict.
- Ignores the child’s feelings that led to the misbehaviour.

- Is a barrier to parent-child communication.
- Fails to recognize that each child is unique.
- Fails to teach internal controls and self-discipline.
- Fails to teach conflict resolution and thinking skills.
- Fails to teach how to make amends or restitution in solving the problem.
- Fails to teach the child how to self-calm when the child is in a high emotional state.
- Isolates the child, rather than promote connection between the child and the “conflict” person.
- Not “mutually respectful”. Adults do not want to be treated in the same way. In real life, if someone is bothering an adult, they can’t move the person to time-out. They have to take the time-out themselves.
- Gives negative attention to the misbehaviour, which may often increase misbehaviour in attention-seeking children.
- Difficult for extroverts who need to “talk through high emotional states.”
- Label’s the child with unhealthy self-esteem. “The naughty child goes to the naughty step”.
- Increases original and repeat behaviours because the child’s underlying needs or feelings are not addressed.
- Children do not have reflective skills until age seven to understand their role in the preceding behaviour.
- Children often do not know or understand why they are in time-out.
- Often used to help the parent calm down rather than for child’s needs.
- Models power over, not peace with.

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