

# TIME OUT...



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"Experts have long touted time-out as effective discipline, particularly with younger children. Time-out is psychological parlance for removing a child from one place (the scene of the problem) and placing him in another place (a chair, corner, floor, bathtub, Antarctica) to cool down."

The purpose of discipline is to guide children toward acceptable and appropriate behavior, so they can learn to control their own actions in order to become independent and self-controlled. The lack of discipline in a child's life during the early years often promotes insecurity, dependence, and uncontrolled behavior. As parents, we have a responsibility to gradually help children gain control of their own bodies and actions. Using time-out is one way we can help children in this process...

Why is time-out a "good thing"? For one, it helps a child gain control. Young children are learning to express their emotions with words instead of their bodies. Therefore, when they become excited, anxious, angry, fearful, etc., it is difficult for them to control themselves. Time-out works because it simply removes the child from the situations he or she is handling inappropriately, and it keeps the child from getting attention that could otherwise reinforce bad behavior.

Time-out is not just for kids; it can also be a saving grace for parents. It allows the parent to relax, calm down, and think rationally. Ideally, a parent should not discipline when s/he is frustrated and angry. But much like a child, adults often struggle to control their emotions. A break in the interaction gives the parent an opportunity to gain control and handle the situation wisely.

"Besides putting a distance between a youngster and trouble, time-out has other benefits. It places a quick consequence on misbehavior (i.e., boredom), though it's amazing how long some kids can amuse themselves with such fun things as air. Time-out gives a child time to settle, though he may use much of it to get further agitated. It also allows parents time to simmer down, assuming that a child quietly accepts his quiet time."

Time-out involves placing your child on a chair for a short period of time following the occurrence of an unacceptable behavior. This procedure has been effective in reducing problem behaviors such as tantrums, hitting, biting, failure to follow directions, leaving the yard without permission, and others. Parents have found that using time-out works better than spanking, yelling at or threatening their children. It is most appropriate for children from about 2 through to 10 years. A child is capable of making connections between action and reaction at 4-5 months of age but limitations in other areas of their development don't allow them to

control their actions. However, a 2-3 year old is beginning to be able to control more of their behaviors. Beginning early helps to prevent the child from having to unlearn poor behavior.

"Most kids don't initially take time-out lying down, or sitting down or standing up. Indeed, I've never come across one child who reacted to time-out with, "Oh gosh, mother, I didn't realize I'd upset you. Please tell me where and how long to isolate myself, and I'll double it." If you have a youngster like this, please contact me immediately. He may need an emergency personality test. While most children quickly inform parents that time-out falls somewhere between a hangnail and broccoli on their list of favorite things, some will tolerate this new tactic until the realization sets in that it's no fun. Then they too will challenge it vocally, and if necessary, physically."

If your child follows the pattern typical of most behavior problem children, you can expect that he or she will become quite upset when first sent to time out. Children may become quite angry and vocal while in time out or may cry because their feelings have been hurt. Children have several purposes for displaying anger and rebellious behavior - to get your attention, to punish you for placing him in time-out, and to force you to stop using time-out. Resist your child's attempts to discourage you from being an effective parent! You love your child and naturally become upset when s/he is unhappy. Consequently, you should rely on your spouse or a trusted friend to give help and emotional support if your child becomes unhappy and hard to handle after being placed in time-out.

For many children, this prolonged tantrum or crying results in having to remain in time-out well past the minimum sentence because they are not yet quiet. They may therefore spend anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 or 2 hours during the first time-out before becoming quiet and agreeing to do what was asked of them. With each use of time-out, you will find your child becoming quiet much sooner. Eventually the child will be quiet for most or all of the minimum sentence and will agree to do what was asked immediately thereafter. You will also find that your child will begin to obey your warnings about undesirable behaviors so that the frequency of time-out eventually decreases.



## PREPARATIONS

1. You should purchase a small portable kitchen timer that rings when time is up.
2. Select a place for time-out. This could be a chair in the hallway, kitchen or corner of a room. It needs to be a dull place (not your child's bedroom) where your child cannot view the television or play with toys. Time-out is not being sent to one's room with TV, Nintendo and a cold coke. Time-out is sitting in a chair in the corner with nothing to do but ponder how to regain control of oneself. Your time-out spot should NOT be a dark, scary or dangerous place. The aim is to remove your child to a place where not much is happening, not to make your child afraid.
3. You should discuss with your spouse which behaviors will result in time-out. Choose a few target behaviors at a time to start with. Do not try to change everything at once, as this would be overwhelming for everyone. Consistency is very important. Make sure that your child knows which behaviors will result in time-out. Parents often establish a new rule (eg. "don't touch the new stereo") and fail to mention the rule to their children. When children break the rule, they don't understand why they are being put in time-out.
4. Explain to your child how the procedure works and try a practice run at a pleasant time so your child knows what to expect. Explain that your child will spend much less time in time-out if he is quiet. Tell your child that you will be using this technique instead of spanking, yelling or threatening. Most children are pleased to learn this.



## PROCEDURE

- ☐ If you are asking your child to do something (stop doing something inappropriate, do a chore, etc.), give your first command to your child in a firm but pleasant voice. DO NOT yell it at the child but also do not ask it as a favor. Make it a simple, direct statement to the child in a businesslike tone of

"Deciding on consequences is the easier part of discipline. Enforcement is the real test of your stamina. The good news is that enforcement gets easier with time. The bad news is that in the beginning you'll have to persevere."

voice. After you have given the command, count to 5 to yourself. Do not count out loud, as the child will eventually come to rely on this counting in learning when to comply with a command. If the child has not made a move to comply within these 5 seconds, you should make direct eye contact, adopt a firm tone of voice, gain a firm posture or stance, and say, "You did not do as I asked - time-out!" You should say this loudly and firmly and take the child to the time-out chair. It is important to administer the time-out before you lose your cool. Once you become angry, the time-out is seen by the child as a result of your anger rather than as the consequence of their out-of-control behavior.

- ❑ If the child has done something which requires sending him to time-out immediately (target behaviors - hitting a sibling, swearing, etc.), say to the child, "You \_\_\_\_\_ (describe what the child did)." For example, "You hit your sister. Go to time-out please." Say this calmly and only once. It is important not to lose your temper or begin nagging.
- ❑ The child is to go to the chair immediately, regardless of any promises he or she may make. If your child has problems getting to the chair quickly, guide him with as little effort as needed. This can range from leading the child part-way by the hand to carrying the child to the chair. If you have to carry your child to the chair, be sure to hold him facing away from you so he doesn't confuse a hug with a trip to time-out. A small amount of physical direction from you will clearly communicate who is in control. The child is not to go to the bathroom, get a drink, or stand and argue with the parent. The child is to be taken immediately to the time-out chair. Even if the child apologizes and begs you not to put them in time-out it is best not to change your mind. Accept and thank them for their apology, then carry through with the consequence. Changing the consequence encourages manipulation.
 

"Stand nearby in a no-nonsense posture. Try folding your arms and staring resolutely, conveying a clear nonverbal message that you mean business. This is only as effective as your ability to withstand pleading. ("Mom, I promise I'll be good until I get married..."), grumbling ("I wish daddy were my mommy, he's never home..."), or the ultimate in childlike sophistication, bonding ("I love you mommy. I want to get up and give you the biggest hug and kiss I ever gave you. Right now, quick, before the feeling goes away.")"
- ❑ When your child is on the chair and quiet, set the timer for a specific number of minutes. The rule of thumb is 1 or 2 minutes for each year of age up to a maximum of 10 minutes. Use the 1 minute rule for mild to moderate misbehavior, and the 2 minute guideline for serious misbehavior. Do not use very long, very short or different periods of time for time-out. Place the timer out of reach but within hearing of your child. If your child (at least 3 or 4 years old) makes noises, screams or cries, reset the timer. Do this EACH time the child makes any noises. For a younger child, it is probably more effective to completely ignore any acting out while in the time-out chair. Noise making is probably the most common rebellious behavior in time-out and may continue for several weeks or longer. Your child is trying to force you to stop using time-out by making noise. Most children do not rebel beyond the first couple of weeks if their parents use time-out correctly. If your child gets off the chair before the time is up, retrieve your child and place her back on the chair. Stand next to the chair and harshly command her to stay on the chair. Say, "Don't you dare get off that chair!"

"Firmly hold your child in time-out. Go this route only if you're clearly able to do so without a wrestling match. Holding only works if there's not doubt who's the holder and who's the holdee."

If she continues trying to escape, you might try one of the following:

- Firmly place your hand on her leg or shoulder and look away from her. Command her to stay on the chair. Say nothing else.
- Stand behind the time-out chair and firmly hold your child on the chair. Tell him that he will be released when he stops trying to get away. Say nothing else. Before beginning this method, you must be determined to win this power struggle. Be firm, but be careful not to hurt your child.
- Firmly hold your child in your lap and sit in the chair yourself. Tell your

child that you will start the timer after he stops trying to get away. You must also be determined to win before beginning this method.

☐ Don't nag, scold, or talk to your child while he is in time-out. All family members should follow this rule. Also, do not talk about the child, don't act angry. Be sure to keep an eye on your child but go back to what you were doing if possible. Remain calm, find something else to do while your child is crying and talking loudly in time-out (read a magazine, listen to music, watch television).

☐ After your child has been quiet and seated for the required amount of time, the timer will ring. Go to the time-out chair and tell your child that the time is up. Do not speak from across the room. If your child does not leave time-out after the timer rings, just tell him that it's okay to get off the chair, and then actively ignore your child or leave the room. After leaving time-out, your child should be able to tell you the reason he was sent to time-out. If he doesn't remember, you tell him what he did. Once the time-out is completed, it can be beneficial to help the child do some problem-solving. "What could you have done instead, so you wouldn't have needed time-out?" Helping the child to think of alternative behaviors is much more productive than artificially punishing him or her to make them feel bad. If the child was sent to time-out for refusing something (chore, etc.) ask him if he is ready to do what you asked. If he is not ready (says "no"), instruct the child to sit in the chair and set the timer again. The child is then to serve another minimum time-out sentence, become quiet, and agree to do what was asked. The child is not to leave the chair until s/he has agreed to do the command originally given. As soon as you have given a command or request and your child begins to comply, praise the child for doing what you asked:

"Look at how nice (fast, neat, etc.)  
you are doing that."

"Good boy/girl for \_\_\_\_."

"I like it when you do as I ask."

"It's nice when you do as I say."

"Thanks for doing what mom/dad  
asked."

☐ After your child finishes a time-out period he should start with a "clean slate." It is not necessary to discuss, remind, or nag about what the child did wrong. Watch for the next appropriate behavior by your child and praise the child for it. This ensures that the child always receives as much reward as punishment in this program and shows that you are not angry at him or her but at what the child did. If your child is angry at you after leaving time-out (but does not cry or scream), ignore it. Don't insist that your child be pleasant after leaving time-out. He has a right to his own feelings.

☐ If your child is placed in time-out during a meal, the child is to miss that meal or that portion of mealtime that was spent sitting in the chair. No effort is to be made to prepare the child a special snack later to compensate for having missed the meal. What makes time-out effective is what your child misses while in the chair and so efforts should not be made to make up for anything the child misses while in time-out.



## TIME OUT IN PUBLIC PLACES

After your child has been trained to comply with commands at home, it will be easier to teach the child to do so in public places, such as stores, restaurants, shopping malls and church. The key to successfully managing children in public places is to establish a plan that you will follow in dealing with your child and to make sure that your child is aware of this plan BEFORE you go into the public place. There are three easy rules to follow before you enter any public place:

### 1. Set up the rules before entering the place.

Just before you are about to enter a public place, stop. Stand aside and review the important rules of conduct with your child. For instance, for a store, the rules for a young child might be, "Stand close, don't touch, and don't beg." For an older child, they might be "Stay next to me, don't ask for anything, and do as I say." Give your child about three rules to follow. These should be rules that are commonly

violated by the child in that particular place. After you have told the child the rules, the child is to say them back to you. You and your child are not to enter the place until the child has said these rules. If your child refuses to say them, then warn your child he or she will be placed in time-out in the car. If the child still refuses, then return to your car and place the child in time-out there for failing to comply with your request.

## **2. Set up an incentive for the child's compliance.**

While standing in front of the place, tell your child what he or she will earn for adhering to the rules you have just specified and for behaving appropriately in the place. For young children, take along a small bag of snack food (peanuts, raisins, pretzels, corn chips, etc.) to dispense to your child for good behavior throughout the trip. On occasion, you may wish to promise your child a purchase of some sort at the end of the trip, but this should only be done on rare occasions and for exceptionally good behavior during the trip so the child does not come to expect such a purchase as a routine part of any trip away from home.

## **3. Set up your punishment for noncompliance.**

While still outside the place, tell your child what the punishment will be for not following the rules or for misbehavior. Use time-out for moderate to major misbehavior or noncompliance. Do not be afraid to use the time-out method in a public place, as it is the most effective method for teaching the child to obey rules in such places. After you have explained the punishment to the child, then you may enter the public place. Upon doing so, you should begin immediately to do two things: Look around the public place for a convenient time-out location if you should need one, and attend to and praise your child for following the rules. If your child starts to misbehave, IMMEDIATELY place the child in time-out. Do not repeat commands or warnings to the child, as the child was forewarned as to what would happen if he or she misbehaved.

## **CONVENIENT TIME-OUT PLACES**

- 1. Department Stores...** Take the child to an aisle that is not used a lot by others and place the child facing a dull side of a display counter or corner; take the child to the coats section and have him or her face the coat rack; use the gift wrap or credit department area where there is a dull corner; use a dull corner of a restroom; use a changing or dressing room if nearby; use a maternity section (it is not very busy and there are sympathetic moms there).
- 2. Grocery Stores...** Have the child face the side of a frozen foods counter (avoid the urge to put the child in the counter itself!); take the child to the furthest corner of the store; find the greeting card display and have the child face the dull side of the display. Most grocery stores are difficult for finding a time-out place, so you may have to be creative.
- 3. In Church...** Take the child to the "crying room" found in most churches where mothers take irritable babies during the service; use the foyer or entryway to the church; use a restroom off the lobby of the church.
- 4. In a Restaurant...** Use the restrooms or another appropriate location - outside or in the car if necessary.
- 5. In Another's Home...** Be sure to explain to them that you are using time-out as a behavior management technique and that you may need to place your child in a dull corner somewhere if misbehavior develops. Ask them where one could be used.
- 6. During a Long Car Trip...** Review the rules with the child and set up your incentive before having the child enter the car. Be sure to take along games or activities for the child to do during the trip. If you need to punish the child, pull off the road to a safe stopping area and have the child serve the time-out on the floor of the back seat. Never leave the child in the car unattended.

If you use time-out in a public place, the minimum sentence needs to be only a half of what it normally is at home, since time-out in public places is very effective with children.

If you cannot find a time-out place wherever you are, take the child outside of the building and have him or her face the wall.

Whenever you are out with your child, be sure to act QUICKLY to deal with misbehavior, so that it does not escalate into a loud confrontation with the child or a temper tantrum. Also, be sure to give frequent praise and rewards throughout the trip to reinforce your child's good behavior.

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## THINGS TO CHECK IF TIME-OUT DOESN'T WORK

The time-out method is easy to use, but it's also easy to make mistakes. Common mistakes parents make with time-out:

- ➔ **Talking or arguing with your child after placing her in time-out.**  
Ignore your child during time-out.
- ➔ **Talking or arguing with your child *before* placing her in time-out.**  
Be brief. Use no more than 10 words and 10 seconds in quickly getting your child to time-out. A good guideline is one word per year of age: e.g. for a 3 year-old, "No hitting, time-out."
- ➔ **Using a small child's chair, rocking chair, bed, playpen or couch as a time-out place for your toddler or preschooler.**  
Use a large straight-back chair as a time-out place.
- ➔ **Using your child's bedroom or an interesting place for time-out.**  
Use a boring place. Bathroom, hallway, corner, etc. Television, radio or a nice view out a window can make your child's experience more pleasant or encourage her to talk, prolonging her stay in time-out. This is to be avoided.
- ➔ **Keeping track of the time yourself or using a timer on the kitchen stove.**  
Make sure the child can see and hear the timer. Use a portable timer that will ring when time is up.
- ➔ **Threatening to use time-out instead of actually using it.**  
Actually use time-out each time the target behavior appears, don't just threaten to use it. Warnings only teach your child that he or she can misbehave at least once (or more) before you'll use time-out. Warnings make things worse, not better.
- ➔ **Trying to shame or frighten your child with time-out.**  
Use time-out to bore your child, not to shame or frighten.
- ➔ **Using very long, short, or different periods of time.**  
Be consistent. One minute per year of age in general, two minutes for very serious behavior.
- ➔ **Inconsistency.**  
All adults who are responsible for disciplining your child at home should be using time-out. You should agree when and for what behaviors to send your child to time-out. (You will want sitters, visiting friends, and relatives to read and discuss the time-out guidelines.) In addition to this, remember to use time-out for big as well as small behavior concerns. Many parents tend to feel that time-out is not enough punishment for big things and this leads to inconsistent discipline. Consistency is very important if you want time-out to work - for both big and small problems.
- ➔ **Letting your child convince you that time-out is not working.**  
Your child may say, "Going to the chair doesn't bother me," or "I like time-out." Don't fall for this trick. Many children try to convince their parents that time-out is fun and therefore not working. You should notice over time that the problem behaviors for which you use time-out occur less often. Remember that time-out is not supposed to be a miserable experience, it is meant to make your child slow down and think about their behavior. Your child may also act like time-out is a "game". He or she may put herself in time-out or ask to go to time-out. If this happens, give your child what he wants - put him or her in time-out and require the usual amount of time and sitting quietly. Your child will soon learn that time-out is not a game.
- ➔ **Letting your child gain your attention while in the chair.**  
If your child does something in the chair that is inappropriate (swearing, spitting) or that annoys you, it is important that you completely ignore your child when he behaves badly in time-out. Do not talk to your child, merely reset the timer as many times as necessary. This will teach your child that "attention-getting" strategies won't work. Your child may also laugh and giggle when

being placed in time-out or while in time-out. Although this may aggravate you, it is important that you ignore your child while s/he is in time out.

➡ **Not giving your child enough positive attention during the day.**

In order for time-out to be truly effective, the rest of the day should be as pleasant as possible for your child. Remember to praise your child when he or she is well behaved or does something good. There can never be too much praise or too many hugs where children are concerned. Some suggestions for ways you can show your child positive feedback:

**NONVERBAL SIGNS OF APPROVAL:** Hug, pat on the head or shoulder, affectionate tousling of hair, placing arm around the child, smiling, a kiss, giving a thumbs-up sign, a wink.

**VERBAL APPROVAL:**

I like it when you ____.	What a nice thing to do...
It's nice when you ____.	You did that all by yourself... way to go!
You sure are a big boy/girl for ____.	I am very proud of you when you ____.
That was terrific the way you ____.	Fantastic! Super! Beautiful!
Just for behaving so well, you and I will ____.	Great job! Nice going! Terrific! Wow!
I always enjoy it when we ____ like this.	My, you sure act grown up when you ____.
Wait until I tell your mom/dad how nicely you ____.	
You know, 6 months ago you couldn't do that as well as you can now - you're really growing up fast!	

Don't make the mistake of taking good behavior for granted! Catch your children being good and let them know that you appreciate it! Most children would rather have negative attention (you putting them in time-out) than no attention at all. Always be as immediate as possible with your approval. Don't wait. Always be specific about what it is that you like.

It's important to reward your child's good behavior. Rewarding good behavior is the easiest and best way to improve behavior. What rewards should parents use? Rewards that motivate children can be social rewards, activity rewards and material rewards...

**REWARDS CHILDREN LIKE**

**Social Rewards:** smiles, hugs, pats, attention, touching, clapping hands, winks, praise, "good job", "well done".

**Activity Rewards:** play cards with parent, go to park, read book with parent, help bake cookies, watch a movie, have a friend over, play ball with parent, play a game together, go out for pizza together.

**Material Rewards:** ice cream, ball, money, book, skipping rope, balloons, yo-yo, flashlight, special treat (candy, etc.), cassette tape.

It's also important to fail to reward your child's bad behavior. If you accidentally reward bad behavior, you will strengthen that behavior. Reward only good behavior and do it quickly and often.

### DEFINITION

Time-out consists of immediately isolating a child in a boring place for a few minutes whenever she misbehaves. Time-out is also called quiet time, thinking time, or cooling-off time. Time-out has the advantage of providing a cooling-off period to allow both child and parent to calm down and regain control of their emotions.

Used repeatedly and correctly, the time-out technique can change almost any childhood behavior. Time-out is the most effective consequence for toddlers and preschoolers who misbehave—much better than threatening, shouting, or spanking. Every parent needs to know how to give time-out.

Time-out is most useful for aggressive, harmful, or disruptive behavior that cannot be ignored. Time-out is unnecessary for most temper tantrums. Time-out is not needed until a child is at least 8 months old and beginning to crawl. Time-out is rarely needed for children younger than 18 months because they usually respond to verbal disapproval. The peak ages for using time-out are 2 to 4 years. During these years children respond to action much better than to words.

### CHOOSING A PLACE FOR TIME-OUT

- **A time-out chair.** When a chair is designated for time-out, it gives time-out a destination. The chair should be in a boring location, facing a blank wall or a corner. Don't allow your child to take anything with her to time-out, such as a toy, pacifier, security blanket, or pet. The child shouldn't be able to see television or other people from the location. A good chair is a heavy one with side arms. Placed in a corner, such a chair surrounds the child with boundaries, leaves a small space for the legs, and reduces thoughts of escape. Alternatives to chairs are standing in a particular corner, sitting on a particular spot on the floor, or being in a playpen (if the child is not old enough to climb out of it).

Usually the chair is placed in an adjacent hallway or room. Some children less than 2 years old have separation fears and need the time-out chair (or playpen) to be in the same room as the parent. When you are in the same room as your child, carefully avoid making eye contact with the child.

- **A time-out room.** Children who refuse to stay in a time-out chair need to be sent to a time-out room. Confinement to a room is easier to enforce. The room should be one that is safe for the child and contains no valuables. The child's bedroom is often the most convenient and safe place for time-out. Although toys are available in the bedroom, the child does not initially play with them because he or she is upset about being excluded from mainstream activities. Forbid turning on the radio, stereo, or video games during time-out in the bedroom. Avoid any room that is dark or scary (such as some basements), contains hot water (bathrooms), or has filing

cabinets or bookshelves that could be pulled down on the child.

- **Time-out away from home.** Time-out can be effectively used in any setting. In a supermarket, younger children can be put back in the grocery cart and older children may need to stand in a corner. In shopping malls, children can take their time-out sitting on a bench or in a restroom. Sometimes a child needs to be taken to the car and made to sit on the floor of the back seat for the required minutes. If the child is outdoors and misbehaves, you can ask her to stand facing a tree.

### HOW TO ADMINISTER TIME-OUT

- **Deciding the length of time-out.** Time-out should be short enough to allow your child to have many chances to go back to the original situation and learn the acceptable behavior. A good rule of thumb is 1 minute per year of age (with a maximum of 5 minutes). After age 6, most children can be told they are in time-out "until you can behave," allowing them to choose how long they stay there. If the problem behavior recurs, the next time-out should last the recommended time for their age.

Setting a portable kitchen timer for the required number of minutes is helpful. The best type ticks continuously and rings when the time is up. A timer can stop a child from asking the parents when he or she can come out.

- **Sending your child to time-out.** Older children will usually go to time-out on their own. Younger children often need to be led there by their wrist, or in some cases carried there protesting. If your child doesn't go to time-out within 5 seconds, take her there. Tell your child what she did wrong in one sentence (such as, "No hitting"). If possible, also clarify the preferred behavior (such as, "Be kind to George"). These brief comments give your child something to think about during the time-out.
- **Requiring quiet behavior in time-out.** The minimum requirement for time-out completion is that your child does not leave the chair or time-out place until the time-out is over. If your child leaves ahead of time, reset the timer.

Some parents do not consider a time-out to be completed unless the child has been quiet for the entire time. However, until 4 years of age, many children are unwilling or unable to stay quiet. Ignore tantrums in time-out, just as you should ignore tantrums outside of time-out. After age 4, quiet time is preferred but not required. You can tell your child, "Time-out is supposed to be for thinking, and to think you've got to be quiet. If you yell or fuss, the time will start over."

- **Dealing with room damage.** If your child makes a mess in his room (e.g., empties clothing out of drawers or takes the bed apart), she must clean it up before she is released from time-out. Toys that were misused can be packed away. Some damage



can be prevented by removing any scissors or crayons from the room before the time-out begins.

- **Releasing your child from time-out.** To be released, your child must have performed a successful time-out. This means she stayed in time-out for the required number of minutes. Your child can leave time-out when the timer rings. If you don't have a timer, she can leave when you tell her, "Time-out is over. You can get up now." Many parents of children over 4 years old require their children to be quiet at the end of time-out. If a child is still noisy when the timer rings, it can be reset for 1 minute.

## **BACK-UP PLANS**

- **The younger child who refuses to stay in time-out.** In general, if a child escapes from time-out (gets up from the chair or spot), you should quickly take the child back to time-out and reset the timer. This approach works for most children. If a child refuses to stay in time-out, the parent should take action rather than arguing or scolding the child. You may temporarily need to hold a strong-willed, 2- or 3-year-old child in time-out. Holding your child in time-out teaches your child that you mean what you say and that she must obey you. Place your child in the time-out chair and hold her by the shoulders from behind. Tell your child that you will stop holding her when she stops trying to escape. Then avoid eye contact and any more talking. Pretend that you don't mind doing this and are thinking of something else or listening to music. Your child will probably stop trying to escape after a week of this approach.

A last resort for young children who continue to resist sitting in a chair is putting them in the bedroom with a gate blocking the door. Occasionally a parent with carpentry skills can install a half-door. If you cannot devise a barricade, then you can close the door. You can hold the door closed for the 3 to 5 minutes it takes to complete the time-out period. If you don't want to hold the door, you can put a

latch on the door that allows it to be temporarily locked. Most children need their door closed only two or three times.

- **The older child who refuses to stay in time-out.** An older child can be defined in this context as one who is too strong for the parent to hold in a time-out chair. In general, any child older than 5 years who does not take time-out quickly should be considered a refuser. In such cases the discipline should escalate to a consequence that matters to the child. First, you can make the time-out longer, adding 1 extra minute for each minute of delay. Second, if 5 minutes pass without your child going to time-out, your child can be grounded. "Grounded" is defined as no television, radio, stereo, video games, toys, telephone access, outside play, snacks, or visits with friends. After grounding your child, walk away and no longer talk to her. Your child becomes "ungrounded" only after she takes her regular time-out plus the 5 minutes of penalty time. Until then, her day is very boring. If your child refuses the conditions of grounding, she can be sent to bed 15 minutes earlier for each time she breaks the grounding requirements. The child whose behavior doesn't improve with this approach usually needs to be evaluated by a mental health professional.

## **PRACTICING TIME-OUT WITH YOUR CHILD**

If you have not used time-out before, go over it with your child before you start using it. Tell your child it will replace spanking, yelling, and other forms of discipline. Review the kinds of negative behavior that will lead to placement in time-out. Also review the positive behavior that you would prefer. Then pretend with your child that he has broken one of the rules. Take him through the steps of time-out so he will understand your directions when you send him to time-out in the future. Also teach this technique to your babysitter.

## DEFINITION

A temper tantrum is an immature way of expressing anger. No matter how calm and gentle a parent you are, your child will probably throw some tantrums. Try to teach your child that temper tantrums don't work and that you don't change your mind because of them. By 3 years of age, you can begin to teach your child to verbalize his feelings ("You feel angry because . . ."). We need to teach children that anger is normal but that it must be channeled appropriately. By school age, temper tantrums should be rare. During adolescence, tantrums reappear, but your teenager can be reminded that blowing up creates a bad impression and that counting to 10 can help her regain control.

## RESPONSES TO TEMPER TANTRUMS

Overall, praise your child when she controls her temper, verbally expresses her anger, and is cooperative. Be a good model by staying calm and not screaming or having adult tantrums. Try using the following responses to the different types of temper tantrums.

1. **Support and help children having frustration- or fatigue-related tantrums.** Children often have temper tantrums when they are frustrated with themselves. They may be frustrated because they can't put something together. Young children may be frustrated because their parents don't understand their speech. Older children may be frustrated with their inability to do their homework.

At these times your child needs encouragement and a parent who listens. Put an arm around her and say something brief that shows understanding such as "I know it's hard, but you'll get better at it. Is there something I can do to help you?" Also give praise for not giving up. Some of these tantrums can be prevented by steering your child away from tasks that she can't do well.

Children tend to have more temper tantrums when they are tired (e.g., when they've missed a nap) because they are less able to cope with frustrating situations. At these times put your child to bed. Hunger can contribute to temper tantrums. If you suspect this, give your child a snack. Temper tantrums also increase during sickness.

2. **Ignore attention-seeking or demanding-type tantrums.** Young children may throw temper tantrums to get their way. They may want to go with you rather than be left with the babysitter, want candy, want to empty a desk drawer, or want to go outside in bad weather. They don't accept rules for their safety. Tantrums for attention may include whining, crying, pounding the floor or wall, slamming a door, or breath holding. As long as your child stays in one place and is not too disruptive, you can leave her alone.

If you recognize that a certain event is going to push your child over the edge, try to shift her

attention to something else. However, don't give in to your child's demands. During the temper tantrum, if her behavior is harmless, ignore it completely. Once a tantrum has started, it rarely can be stopped.

Move away, even to a different room; then your child no longer has an audience. Don't try to reason with your child—it will only make the tantrum worse. Simply state, "I can see you're very angry. I'll leave you alone until you cool off. Let me know if you want to talk." Let your child regain control. After the tantrum, be friendly and try to return things to normal. You can prevent some of these tantrums by saying "no" less often.

3. **Physically move children having refusal-type tantrums.** If your child refuses something unimportant (such as a snack or lying down in bed), let it go before a tantrum begins. However, if your child must do something important, such as go to bed or to day care, she should not be able to avoid it by having a tantrum. Some of these tantrums can be prevented by giving your child a 5-minute warning instead of asking her suddenly to stop what she is doing. Once a tantrum has begun, let your child have the tantrum for 2 or 3 minutes. Try to put her displeasure into words: "You want to play some more, but it's bedtime." Then take her to the intended destination (e.g., the bed), helping her as much as is needed (including carrying).
4. **Use time-outs for disruptive-type tantrums.** Some temper tantrums are too disruptive for parents to ignore. On such occasions send or take your child to her room for 2 to 5 minutes. Examples of disruptive behavior include

- Clinging to you or following you around during the tantrum
- Hitting you
- Screaming or yelling for such a long time that it gets on your nerves
- Having a temper tantrum in a public place such as a restaurant or church (Move your child to another place for her time-out. The rights of other people need to be protected.)
- Throwing something or damaging property during a temper tantrum

5. **Hold children having harmful or rage-type tantrums.** If your child is totally out of control and screaming wildly, consider holding her. Her loss of control probably scares her. Also hold your child when she is having tantrums that carry a danger of self-injury (such as if she is violently throwing herself backward).

Take your child in your arms, tell her you know she is angry, and offer her your sense of control. Hold her until you feel her body start to relax. This usually takes 1 to 3 minutes. Then let her go. This comforting response is rarely needed after 3 years of age.