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This intervention is a set of recommendations that should reduce or eliminate the problems in question in most average children. If problems do not improve and/or if problems are severe, you should seek the personal assistance of a child psychologist, psychiatrist, or pediatrician for further evaluation and treatment.

This handout is best used with face to face discussion/training which allows the care giver to ask questions and allows the psychologist to recommend variations in the procedure based on the age and developmental level of the child. Do not use this procedure if you are not comfortable using it or if you aren't sure you fully understand the procedure and can do it correctly.

USE OF TIME OUT IN THE HOME

Definition

Time out is a discipline procedure involving an interruption in rewarding activities. Time out means time away from attention and other forms of positive reinforcement. It is used to reduce or eliminate certain types of behavior.

Age Limits

Time out can be effective with children between the ages of three and twelve years. The child must be old enough to understand the relationship between their behavior (hitting) and the consequence (time out). It could be effective with a bright two year old, but might not be appropriate for an developmentally delayed three year old.

Time Limits

As a general rule, the amount of time in time out should be one minute for each year of age, so a five year old would be in time out five minutes. However, some children will tantrum when placed in time out. It is important that they remain in time out until they have stopped protesting. Even if the time limit has been reached, time out is not over until the child has been calm and quiet for two minutes.

Location

Time out in a chair that is placed away from others may be effective for average children who occasionally misbehave, who are capable of remaining calm, and who will stay where they are placed. However, for children with more challenging behavior problems, time out is most effective when the child is placed in a room with the door closed so they are not able to see and talk to other people. A bathroom, laundry room, or the child's bedroom can be used. The room used should be well lit and well ventilated. It should not be frightening.

It is important that the child be attended, meaning the care giver should remain nearby and should listen to what is going on in the room to make sure the child is not engaging in any activity that could result in injury. The child may throw objects around the room or hit the door. This should be tolerated without opening the door and interrupting the time out. The care giver must enter the room and interrupt the time out if it appears the child is hurting himself .

For Which Behaviors is Time Out Useful

Time out is useful for persistent acting out that is impulsive or hostile in nature. For example, physical aggression, which includes hitting, biting, kicking, scratching, grabbing objects away from others, or throwing objects. Physical aggression is *any act that has the potential to harm or damage a person, pet, or property.*

Time out is also useful for some forms of verbal aggression such as angry screaming or yelling, name-calling, or foul language. Verbal aggression is using ones voice in an angry manner.

Time out is not useful for pouting, whining, or arguing; being overly fearful or shy; failing to do chores or school work; making a mess; and wetting or soiling pants or the bed. Time out can be very effective for non-compliance (failing to comply with directions), but it must be used along with another procedure. (See handout on Compliance.)

Getting Ready

Time out will not be effective if you use it for too many different types of behavior problems at the same time. Decide which behaviors will result in time out. It is best to start with physical aggression and tantrums. Wait until these problems are much improved before also using (adding) time out for verbal aggression or non-compliance.

Decide on the location and make that area ready. For example, if you are using a bathroom, remove cleaning products and sharp or other objects that could be dangerous.

Let your child know which specific behaviors will result in a time out (give her examples), where it will be, and how long her time out will be.

Placing a Child in Time Out

1. Only use time out for those behaviors you see or hear – behaviors you are certain occurred. Do not place a child in time out when another child tattles. If you are having a hard time catching the child in the act, this may be an indication you need to supervise more closely.

Use of Time Out in the Home

2. When the behavior occurs, use no more than ten words and take no more than ten seconds to place the child in time out. For example, “You hit your sister. You must have a time out.”
3. Always escort the child to time out. Do not send them.
4. Do not respond to any arguing, whining, denials, or promises of future good behavior. This is not the time to discuss the problem.
5. Be consistent. Time out will not reduce inappropriate behavior unless it is used each time the behavior is observed.

When the Child is in Time Out

1. Use a timer. Don’t try to estimate the time.
2. Remove all attention. Neither you nor any other person should have any conversation with the child during this time. Crying, yelling, and even kicking the door should be ignored. Remain nearby to make sure the child is not engaging in dangerous acts.
3. If you are using a chair and the child gets up, put them back. If they get up repeatedly, put them back each time. If the child is in a room and they open the door, stand outside the room and hold the door closed if necessary.

When Time Out is Over

When time is over, take the child from time out yourself. If he is still protesting or having a tantrum, wait until he has been quiet for two minutes before ending the time out. If he has made a mess in the time out area, he must clean up the mess before he can come out.

After time out, you may ask your child to explain why she went to time out. You should have her apologize to the person or pet she tried to hurt or offend. If she threw an object it should be left for her to put back where it belongs.

Time Out Away From Home

Be prepared to use time out away from home. A good place for time out when away from home is the car. When you are in the grocery store or a restaurant and a time out offense occurs, take your child to the car and place them inside. Open the windows when the weather is warm. Stand by the car with your back turned while you are using your watch or estimating the time. If you are in the car when the offense occurs, pull over to the curb or into a parking lot where it is safe to stop and get out. Everyone should get out of the car except the child who is in time out.

Rewards

Reward your child for going all day without a time out. Children who will be earning several time out's a day, especially younger children, might need to be rewarded two or three times a day, e.g, for not having a time out before lunch, by dinner time, by bed time. An example of a reward might be allowing them to pick something out of a reward box. The box could contain small toys, treats, and coupons for special time with a parent.

Things to Remember

If you are going to punish your children for hitting, you should not be hitting them. Yours should be a no-hitting household. Spanking can cause the child to be more aggressive.

Control your temper. Do not use harsh words or become physically rough. Parents tend to become angry when frustrated. They tend to be frustrated when they don't know what to do. It is important to have a plan for how you will handle your child's acting out behavior so you are prepared and can easily remain calm.

Time out should be used for all children in the home, not just the one difficult child you are most concerned with.

Teach your child appropriate behaviors to take the place of the inappropriate behaviors you are trying to eliminate. Teach your child what to do when she is angry instead of hitting or shouting. Sit with your child and make a list of behaviors that are okay when angry such as shouting into a pillow. "It's okay to feel angry, but it's not okay to hurt people or property. When you are feeling angry, what are some things you can do instead of screaming or hitting?"

When you observe your child handle a difficult situation in an appropriate manner, call his attention to it and praise him. "Your sister grabbed that toy and you walked away and found another toy. That was a good choice. I feel proud when you make good choices like that."