



Discipline is  
about listening –  
not reacting – and  
setting the tone for  
acceptable  
behavior.

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## Discipline

### Using time outs effectively

Too often, parents are stuck in the role of police officer and not parent. Many parents try to discipline children by using control, but discipline is about listening – not reacting – and setting the tone for acceptable behavior.

Parents should not think of discipline as punishment for poor behavior. Rather, parents should think about how to show their

children the consequences of their actions and how to teach new, acceptable behavior. Discipline is a slow and consistent process that yields positive results.

Discipline provides children with the tools to be the best they can be in any situation. Discipline teaches children self-control and respect and requires parents to model these values themselves.

### What parents can do

One popular method of discipline is the use of “time outs.” Time outs are used most effectively with children aged 3 - 5. For time outs to be effective, they must:

- Be used consistently.
- Be used for an appropriate duration.
- Not be used excessively.

A good guideline for duration of a time out is one minute for each year of the child’s age. Avoid the urge to issue a 15-minute time out for a 5-year-old. To a child of that age, 15 minutes is an eternity, and most 5-year-olds are physically and mentally unable to sit quietly for that period of time. To help your child understand that there will be a finite end to the time out, use a timer or alarm clock. Children like to be able to see and hear when their time is up.

Children should be placed in a chair or on the floor in a safe area of the home that is free from distraction and parent or sibling interaction. Placing a child behind a locked door is not safe or recommended.

When using time outs parent must:

- Understand that when first beginning to use time outs with a child, the child will

most likely increase his or her negative behavior. The child is testing your patience.

- Stay calm. Don’t get angry. Don’t get physically or verbally abusive with the child, doing so will only escalate the situation.
- Accept that the child’s displeasure with being put into time out is a normal reaction.
- Understand and accept your own feelings of distress and frustration if you cannot ignore the child’s pleading and bargaining to be released from a time out.
- Remember that when the time out is over, it’s over. The time has been served and everyone should get on with their day.

Most children under the age of three are not ready developmentally to benefit from a time out. Instead of using time outs with children younger than 3 years of age, parents should focus on diverting the child’s attention from the unwanted behavior or activity to an activity or behavior the parent desires.