

"Time Out" — Time Off or Serving Time?

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 6 September, 2003 - 08:08

Posted on the [TCS List](#) on Mon, 4 Jan., 1999

Sarah Fitz-Claridge (<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>)

Someone had written:

My active, incredible boy child. :) is in a time-out right now. Now I know time-outs don't work.

A poster replied:

I do think that time outs work sometimes – it gives both parents and children a chance to take a deep breath and think things through. I am just as likely to put myself in “time out” when things are going badly as I am to put the kids in “time out.” “Time out” simply means time away from the situation. Time out can mean going into a quiet room and reading a book – it does not have to mean punishment. It is simply a break from the pressure of the current situation.

Is it not worth distinguishing between the following two different meanings of the word “time out”?

1. of your own free will going into a quiet room and reading a book for however long you choose (a relaxing time)

and

2. against your will going into a quiet room for however long someone else makes you stay there (imprisonment)

Do we not need two words here? Is “time out” *time off*, or is it *servicing time*? If one fails to distinguish between these two very different cases it might be thought that this ambiguous use of the term “time out” is a deliberate equivocation in which one is spuriously justifying coercive time out (2), using arguments that refer to non-coercive time out (1).

The mere fact that parents using time out (2) punishment may order their child to the time-out chair or room in a soft voice does not make it time out (1). It is the meaning that counts, not the tone of voice, and if the meaning belies the tone of voice, that just compounds the punishment by adding a double bind.

to post comments

Comments

Well said.

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 8 December, 2003 - 06:07

I have never liked the idea of time-out. It seems to me it is the same punishment my parents used to use when I was a young child: when I would be told to "go to my room". The only difference is that time-outs (i.e. definiton 2 in the article) pretend to be different because they are shorter (often only a few minutes). "Time-off" is a much better state.

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I'm gonna have to disagree...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 30 April, 2004 - 22:12

As a college student, I'm not very far out of childhood myself (as I'm occasionally reminded of when I go home!), and I remember quite vividly our family's "time-out chair." It was in the living room, not the family room, and it was too big and not too comfortable and I was close enough to the rest of the family to hear them having fun without me, but not close enough to join in, and it was *boring*. I hated it. I would have preferred a spanking.

And yet...

Sometimes we needed it. Because, quite frankly, I was occasionally downright rotten to my little brother. And he was sometimes rotten to me. And sometimes, just as a change of pace, we would gang up and be rotten to our parents. Not because they raised us wrong or our home life was bad - ye gods no! Looking back and comparing my family with others, I wouldn't change a thing about the way my brother and I were raised. But sometimes, kids are jerks. Sometimes adults are jerks, too. We all have jerk days. And unfortunately, trying to get a brother and sister to agree on a "common preference" doesn't work too well when a) emotions are already running high or b) the conflict isn't based on anything more rational than being in a bad mood and wanting to pick on someone. The time-outs, irritating as they were, actually worked. After the first minute of fuming, I was able to calm down - it's hard to keep up a full head of mad when there's no one to argue with. Sometimes I'd even be able to admit (to myself - never to him!) that maybe my brother had been in the right and I was just being a jerk. And by the time I was allowed to leave, I was generally so relieved and grateful to be back in the world that the old feeling of wanting to pick on someone was gone. It was, by the strictest sense of the word, coercion, I suppose, but no worse than the "coercion" enforced by our legal system when one adult assaults or harrasses another without cause. Even as kids, and even through our sense of "it's not fair because I don't like it!" mentality, we did realize, when we were honest with ourselves, that some coercion in order to keep my brother from being punched or me from being pinched or expensive/beloved items from being destroyed was sometimes necessary and justified. I'd argue that most kids, in fact, are smart enough to understand this.

[to post comments](#)

Nauseating view

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 1 June, 2004 - 07:47

When my son is throwing an ever living fit and there is no talking to him at the moment because of his wanting to scream I will put him in his room. I will NOT however make him stay there for a certain amount of time. I tell

him that when he is done screaming and ready to talk to me about the issue than he is welcome to come out at any time and talk to me. There is nothing wrong with him expressing his emotions. However, if it is to the point that he is uncontrollably raging and is damaging to others ear drums.. then he need be removed until we can confront the issue rationally. It is his choice when he can come out of the room. Not mine.

Any comments on this view?

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Who came out with the concept of "Time Out"?

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 20 August, 2004 - 17:20

Who came out with the concept of "Time Out"? Please let me know.

[to post comments](#)

Time out's don't work

Submitted by a readerqeeea (not verified) on 15 January, 2005 - 20:59

I just got passed the stage where they were given out (I'm thirteen). What went on in my head:

This is stupid and boring. Understimulation can result in learning problems, or something like that. Do I even care? I didn't do anything. NOT FAIR NOT FAIR NOT FAIR. How come kids have to be IMPRISONED for little things while adults get to do anything they want. Oh great now I sound like a little kid. What I meant was that they don't get in trouble for minor things, like watching T.V. for a long period of time ONCE or staying up too late even though you aren't tired. Hormones make it hard for children to fall asleep! This is so not fair. Why do I even bother doing good in school? Grades don't count till middle school! Next time I think I'll purposely get a low grade. I mean why not? My parent's can't even find a better way to handle my yelling at my ister. She ATTACKED me yet I get in trouble because I'm older. My parent's are NEVER going to see my future children!

You get the point. Time outs only made me more upset. If you want your kid thinking these thoughts go ahead...

[to post comments](#)

taking a child to their room

Submitted by adele (not verified) on 4 March, 2005 - 19:07

i would do the same thing, take a child to her room when she is screaming so loud that it undoubtedly disturbing to others. I feel like that would be coercive but I would tell her she has to stop screaming if she wants to join the rest of the group. would you do this? is there a better way?

[to post comments](#)

time outs

Submitted by plaidpants (not verified) on 18 March, 2005 - 13:19

I think its useful to talk about ages rather than just saying "children" - not that ages are homogenous, but the issues are somewhat different when a person is three vs eleven (for example). I can say to my 11yr-old "I'm really pissed off right now and need some time to calm down" I can't say that to my three-yr-old. I can validate her feelings, I can respect her right to stomp off and take time for herself, I can work to diffuse a situation before it develops into a crisis, but if I leave, she is left with basically the same situation as if she is in "time out" - maybe scarier, possibly more dangerous.

[to post comments](#)

help i live with a 4 year old

Submitted by Help me (not verified) on 6 April, 2005 - 01:57

help i live with a 4 year old child who seems to have an anger problem and his mother doesn't know how to deal with it, he gets mad fast and at anything, we dotn know what to doThe worst thing is when he gets mad he is out to hurt you,,seriously.....He bites, attacks, spits, covers your mouth and it may not seem that bad but you have to be here, Ii have been around little children , a lot of them and he is the worst i am writting to you because there is no hope this boy has a problem.

[to post comments](#)

whats his problem?

Submitted by spiffygal1986 on 27 May, 2005 - 23:01

it sounds like you have a major problem. i may be new to this site and have no kids of my own but what i've read there's a reason why he acts this way. like he's trying to get something or trying to tell you something read some of the other articles on this site maybe you can come up with a solution. sit down and talk to him kitty >'.!<

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Amen! They have the right

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 21 August, 2005 - 16:00

Amen! They have the right to pitch a major hissy fit to "express" themselves, however, IMHO, they do not have the "right" to cause my eardrums to split and my blood pressure to skyrocket to extreme heights. Go pitch your fit in your OWN room and come deal with me when you're over it!

[to post comments](#)

I would spank the crap out

Submitted by ahz (not verified) on 27 December, 2006 - 20:13

I would spank the crap out of that kid. Time outs dont work half as well as a spank on the butt. When kids act out like that, they are begging for limits. When you do not discipline a child, they are insecure. my wife and I have never had behavior issues with my children like the ones described above.

to post comments

Verbally Reasoning with Toddlers?

Submitted by Abby (not verified) on 11 October, 2007 - 00:21

There are few toddlers you can reason with, and the few that can understand are intelligent enough to say what you want to hear and then go about business as usual.

The point is not his "expression" making your ears hurt or getting you stressed out- there is a reason for this issue and it is your job as a parent to find it out. It could be lack of boundaries, like ahz said, or it could be lack of stimulation or attention. The lack, in any case, is for the parent to resolve and not necessarily discuss with the tyke.

There's something one of my parents used to say to my sister and I- "Don't teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and annoys the pig."

to post comments

Mares giving time out to colts

Submitted by [a reader \(not verified\)](http://www.ibm.com/not_really) (http://www.ibm.com/not_really) on 3 January, 2008 - 20:58

Horses are social animals; they enjoy being together. When colts misbehave, their mothers, the mares, will stand and/or run between them and the colts, thus keeping the colts away from the rest of the horses. Sort of like time-out?

to post comments

time out

Submitted by Patricia (not verified) on 30 March, 2008 - 05:28

I work with 3 and 4 year olds...they bite,hit,kick each other and time out is the only disciplinary action that have worked for me ...it gives the child and time to reflect on what they have done...I talk to them and let them know whats right from wrong...All I know is that every child is different..some cry and some do not take it to heart...

to post comments

Child Psychology

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 17 September, 2008 - 06:30

This is what I have learned from my college level Child Psychology class. My professor is similar to Nanny 911. Distraught parents come to her to help deal with discipline issues. She was also an active member in establishing and presenting new improved policies to Orange County's group homes. People pay her good money for this SUCCESSFUL information, which we learned in class.

First off, we need to know the difference between "punishment" and "discipline."

Punishment – Any behavior retaliatory or otherwise, which is intended to cause pain, shame, or fear to a child, or to remove a child's control over his or her environment.

Discipline – to teach. The ultimate goal of discipline is self-discipline.

Punishment is never necessary or justified.

The problem with Spankings: It is painful It is shameful Did you ever brag to your friends at school that you were spanked last night? It causes fear of being hit Hands are meant to be tender and loving, not as weapons. If a mother is going to stroke her child's forehead, the child will often flinch if spanked often in the past.

Most important thing we can give a child is a choice.

Do not merely stop the child with "no" and leave it be.

Example: Brennan wants to play Playdoh. Cassie says "no." Brennan will attempt to either 1) get the Playdoh anyways or 2) get into the Moonsand. Cassie again says, "no," so now Brennan moves onto playing in the toilet. Cassie once again says, "no," and he either continues or finds something else to get into. Solution: give him something else. Instead of just saying "no," say "no" and offer something else for him to do, like coloring. That way his want is deflected and he engages in something else you want him to do.

As the child grows older, his or choices also grow. But in proportion, the parent's choices shrink.

5 Questions to Ask Before Setting Rules Must answer YES to all questions

1. Do I really care? If you are thinking to set a rule that you don't really care about and are only doing it because that was one of your parent's rule, don't bother.
2. Does my child have the ability to do what I want him/her to do? You cannot expect a three-year-old to do something a seven-year-old should do. A three-year-old does not have the mental development to understand "clean up your room" because of all the tasks it requires. Narrow it down to something specific like "let's pick up your cars," and take turns with him picking up his cars.
3. Does the environment support my child's following this rule? For example, you cannot expect a twelve year old to come home, eat a snack, and do their homework if there are three other screaming kids, the TV is blaring, and mom is on the phone.
4. Is the rule positively stated? Replace "if" with "when." "If" makes it optional. BAD: You can have ice cream if you pick up your cars. OR If you pick up your cars you can have ice cream. GOOD: When you pick up your cars, then you can have ice cream. In the case that the child makes a choice not to clean up his cars and not take the ice

cream, the reward becomes replaced. If Brennan wants to play with Monty, change the command to “when you clean up your cars, then you can play with Monty,” until your command is met.

5. Can I enforce this rule without the use of any punishment? If the above 4 questions were answered YES, naturally this question will fall into place with a YES as well.

[to post comments](#)

The Issue With Time Out

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 17 September, 2008 - 06:35

Think back to when your parents put you on time out. Chances are, you spent the time thinking about how much you hate your parents and they suck and do not understand you and why do they hate me so much and et cetera. I doubt you sat there thinking, "woah, I really messed up. I'm such a terrible person. I need to right my wrongs." Nope. You were probably thinking how you were going to get back at them and wreak more havoc.

But, parents, there is a solution: Instead of sending them to their rooms or the "chair" or corner, sit down and talk to them about what they did, why it is not acceptable, and offer them ALTERNATIVES. Instead of biting the other kids, give them a coloring book or something.

[to post comments](#)

I just want the ice-cream

Submitted by Willow on 18 September, 2008 - 13:29

Would your all-knowing course tutor care to share the research references from which these sweeping suggestions were made?

I don't understand the difference between withholding icecream because I didn't pick up my cars and spanking me because I didn't pick up my cars. Perhaps we could pick up the cars so that people don't fall over on them, or in order to make space for painting? If you have to use threats or bribes to coerce a child to do something, then you don't really know why they should do it yourself.

I would not expect a 12 year old to do his homework. I would offer him the opportunity so he can do it if he pleases.

If you want your child to do something, then put a good case for it, such as "Let's get in the car so we can go and visit Grandma."

Try me, I would really be interested if there was any research based evidence.

[to post comments](#)

I think these comments are

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 8 February, 2009 - 08:23

I think these comments are very interesting. There hasn't seemed to be much balance in the arguments against time-outs (and spanking). I would just like to comment that my parents put me in time-out and spanked me when necessary, and I did not sit there thinking how much I hated them. Instead I was thinking how much they loved me, and how I had disappointed them by my behavior. I think an important thing to remember is that you have to be consistent. Your children need to have no doubt why they are being punished, and they need to know beforehand what will happen with that behavior. I think time-outs are great, because if a child is mad he isn't always mature enough to think things out, by removing the situation you give the child a time to reflect and understand the situation. As adults, we should be able to think things through more quickly and respond appropriately. On spanking, I was spanked a lot as a child because I was very willful. However, I never cringed from my parent's hands, because they never just spanked me. I always knew when I was being spanked and why I was being spanked. Therefore, it was very easy for me to distinguish between an affectionate act of love and a disciplinary act of love. Lastly, as someone who doesn't have children, I firmly believe that until I and anyone else in my boat do have children, we should not judge and think raising children is so easy. Of course childrearing is easy from the car beside. Perhaps not so much when we take the front seat. Just some thoughts to ponder

[to post comments](#)

I'm Sorry but....

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 10 February, 2009 - 05:31

Hitting your child is not OK for any reason. Spanking is not an "act of love" but an abusive tool used to oppress children. Of course you didn't feel anger towards your parents at that young age and rather disappointment at yourself because your parents had brainwashed you into thinking that they were always right. They were always right and so if they hit you, you must have done something wrong.

I agree children are not as mature as adults, by their very nature. But this does not mean they should be subjected to certain actions just to teach them a lesson. Children are people just like you and me. They deserve to be treated with respect. They deserve even more respect than you would show another adult because they do not understand certain things and have not yet had certain experiences.

Also remember that a five-minute time out is an eternity to a child.

I am very sorry you were hit as a child. I hope you are able to learn from those experiences and treat your own children much differently

[to post comments](#)

Please don't hit children

Submitted by Willow on 27 February, 2009 - 11:07

My child was assaulted yesterday by a child of a similar age. The other mother brought the child to me for a forced apology and a public smack to show she had dealt with it. Maybe the incident would never have happened

if the other child had never been assaulted by their parent. Needless to say we will not be crossing their paths again. :(Willow.

to post comments

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