



# Time-In and Positive Time-Out

*Adapted from Lappin, S. (2014, Oct. 9) and McVittie, J. (2011, Nov. 29) - full citation on reverse*



When we consider use of various discipline tools, it is helpful to consider what we want children to learn and what we are trying to accomplish in the long run. When thinking about using time-out, it is good to ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of a time-out in sports?” “Is it to penalize the players for breaking the rules or is it to give them time to re-group, catch their breath, and come up with another plan?” If our goals for children fit with the second part of this question, two helpful tools are time-in and positive time-out. Both are great ways to teach children how to calm down without isolating them or inviting feelings that can be problematic and lead to further misbehavior.

Being isolated, as described in the Traditional Time-out article in this section of this toolkit, can be very scary and can trigger feelings of abandonment in young children, especially those who have experienced abuse or neglect. When children are put in a time-out place, separate from others, and are told or forced to stay there alone, they may panic, and the negative messages they may already have about what the world is like are re-enforced (if I’m bad, I get sent away). While children can be frightened into compliance, it does not help them learn how to calm down and use their thinking brain to make better choices.

Children have a need to feel important, included and connected. When children act out, it is often because these needs are not being met or they are simply tired or hungry. Sometimes just naming the feeling and the problem is enough to help a child calm down, i.e. “You look frustrated and mad that your tower of blocks fell over.”

## Time-in

Including children in an activity that can be done together can provide an opportunity to re-group and calm down, while fulfilling the need for connection. You could ask them to help you work on something—fold some clothes, bake cookies, go for a walk together, blow bubbles, color, draw or paint, read together, or even sit together and talk about their feelings. If they are willing, sharing a hug can be very powerful and may help them feel connected and calmer.

## Positive Time-Out

Positive time-out is another way to invite children to do what is needed in order to calm down. What kinds of things do we, as adults, do to soothe and calm ourselves? Bubble baths? Music? Creative projects? Reading a book? Everyone needs a time-out every once in a while, because we all make mistakes and at times “lose our cool”. It helps to have a place to sort out feelings and make a decision about what to do.

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Engaging children in identifying a designated positive time-out space creates ownership and increases the likelihood of success. It is helpful to have a designated positive time-out area or give children choices about where they would like to go to re-gather themselves. Brainstorm together the kinds of things that would be helpful, what theme and name to give it, and where it will be located. Ideas include pillows, blankets, favorite stuffed toys, books, writing materials, coloring books, art supplies, music, and a snow

globe to shake and watch as it swirls and settles. Themes could be tropical vacation, outer space or camping. Everyone can be involved in decorating the space. It may be helpful to set guidelines for use of the space, especially if you are worried children will go there to avoid chores or homework.

Positive time-out is more effective if it is chosen by the child rather than ordered by the adult. It might be helpful to ask a child who is struggling to stay calm, “Do

you need to go to [name of cool down area]?” If the child says no, which is unlikely if that child helped create the space, you could ask if it would be helpful to have a time-out buddy go as well.

Children are able to identify for themselves when they are feeling better and can then leave the space. Once children have experienced positive time-out, they often begin to use it without prompting from adults.

Our ability to calm down improves as the brain develops. The prefrontal cortex, where we manage self-regulation, is not fully developed until the age of 25. This means a 3-year-old cannot calm down as easily as a 6-year-old or an adult.

Once both you and the child have calmed down, you can work on solving the problem that created the issue to begin with, if needed. If the problem does not need to be addressed further, the best thing to do is just move on rather than bringing it up again.



(Adapted from Lappin, S. (2014, Oct. 9). Using “Time Out” to Practice Calming Down in the Classroom (or at Home). Sound Discipline: Making Connections that Matter <https://sounddiscipline.wordpress.com/2014/10/09/using-time-out-to-practice-calming-down-in-the-classroom-or-at-home/>)