

## Is Time Out Effective?

**Back in 1996 when I started my first job as a Parent Educator at Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, I became trained to facilitate "positive discipline" parenting workshops.** It was my job to travel throughout the state of North Carolina and facilitate workshops on the perils of punitive discipline techniques and encourage parents to use new strategies like redirection and time-out (or as Supernanny, Jo Frost likes to call it, "the naughty mat.")

**It's more than 10 years later and parents are still replacing spanking with the age-old positive discipline technique known as time-out.** So, after a decade of using this strategy, do we know if it's effective?

**I think in order for us to know if any parenting technique is effective we need to be clear on what we are striving to achieve.** For myself, I want my child to stop behaving *inappropriately* and start behaving *appropriately*. I want my child to know what it is I am expecting of her and I understand that it is my job to teach her the behavior I want to see. Teaching is a process, so it involves showing my child how to be courteous or how to be cooperative with her little brother or how to be flexible when we can't go outside for the picnic due to a sudden thunder storm.

**After much reflection and trial-and-error, it became evident that time-out was not only ineffective but also actually detrimental to the relationship with my dd.** I can remember her misbehaving and feeling like my only response was to threaten her with time-out. I so dreaded following through with it because I knew that it would be a wrestling match or, at the very least, a power struggle involving a screaming tantrum. Once I would get her into time-out, I would feel horrible and she looked emotionally hurt, shamed, and crushed. In [an article by Aletha Solter](#), author of *Tears and Tantrums* and *Helping Young Children Flourish*, she states,

Nothing is more frightening for a child than the withdrawal of love. Along with the fear come insecurity, anxiety, confusion, anger, resentment, and low self-esteem. Time-out can also cause embarrassment and humiliation, especially when used in the presence of other children. In the child's realm of experience, time-out is nothing short of punitive.

And in an article in USA Today associate professor of development studies at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, Judith Myers-Wall explains,

The use of a "time-out" may be an effective way for parents to control youngsters' behavior in the short term, but it will not teach children to manage their own behavior as they grow older.

A mom on a [popular mom blog](#), explains that she uses time-out only as a strategy for helping her to separate squabbling siblings or for herself as a way to collect her thoughts. She had this to say about her version of time-out, which she calls a time-in,

I do 'time ins', which is pretty much the opposite. We gather on the couch to calm down, talk about what happened and see if they can come up with a solution. A lot of times, whatever they are doing is just crying out for attention. I notice that when I'm being distracted with something else they are more likely to basically explode. I couldn't imagine completely cutting them off

from the family and from love just because they broke a rule. What does that teach? *Don't get caught next time? She doesn't really love me?*

**When my dd was 3 1/2 years old, she and I found ourselves more upset about the time-out than about the misbehavior, for example, of throwing a rock at the car.** This misbehavior would be long-forgotten, and now it became a physical task just to guide her to the time-out chair (or spot) *and* keep her there. It didn't take me long to realize that she was learning nothing about the greater message of treating our things with respect and I was feeling even more anger toward her for her unwillingness to sit in time-out! I felt like I was breaking the spirit of a wild horse. We both felt awful. No teaching was occurring and certainly no learning.

**The very technique that Supernanny has imposed on American families each week through her hit TV show may force a child into behaving for the moment, but ultimately it is not a discipline strategy that teaches a child what *to do*, nor is it a discipline strategy that protects the dignity of the child while they learn why their behavior is unacceptable.**

**So what are appropriate alternatives to time-out?** Check out Aletha Solter's article, [20 Alternatives to Punishment](#). Additionally, as a Certified Parent Educator, Coach, and Virtues Project Facilitator, I help parents gain further insight into becoming an effective parent who nurtures their child's ability to be cooperative, gentle, and respectful while honoring their child's spirit through setting appropriate boundaries with relevant, respectful consequences.

**I teach an educative parenting philosophy** rather than an authoritarian, democratic, or permissive philosophy through my weekly blog posts and through [personal parent coaching](#) (by phone or home visit), and my transformational [5-week parenting course](#).

**In March I'm offering 5 Free 30-minute "Discipline Make-Over" [phone coaching sessions](#)** - first come, first served. Just [contact me](#) and let me know that you want to schedule yours. My [5-week course](#) is sponsored this month by DeeDee Lavinder, owner of [The Red Hen](#), on 5 Tuesdays in March, 7:30-9:30pm. It's not too late to [register](#) and transform yourself from feeling ho hum about your parenting to feeling confident and effective!