

If a child will only sit for 30 seconds at first, then end it after 30 seconds. But it needs to be up to the adult in charge, not the child, to say when the timeout is over. Once everyone involved gets the hang of doing timeouts the right way, they can gradually last longer. If your child was cooperative, thank them for that afterward.

Once the timeout ends, reconnect. This could be sitting on the floor and playing together. Or parents, other guardians and frequent caregivers can watch for things the child does that they want to see happen more often and praise that behavior.

Both parents and children need to follow all of these steps every time for timeouts to work. If you have trouble controlling your own temper, try something else. Also, timeouts aren't appropriate for all children.

In most families, however, I find that timeouts work because young children realize that hitting and other kinds of misbehavior will bring about an unwanted break from having fun.



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Timeouts: A step-by-step guide

Timeouts are most appropriate for children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old. They should last a minute for each year of the child's age.

	Step	What to keep in mind
1	Briefly explain the reason for the timeout	You can warn the child first, but just once
2	Quietly walk the child to their designated timeout chair. Tell them to sit there until you say it's time to get up	Set an example of how to be calm by remaining quiet and exercising self-control. If the child refuses to go to the chair, pick them up gently from the back, under the arms, and carry them there
3	Put the child in the chair while repeating the reason for the timeout	Remain calm and say nothing else. Make sure the child stays in the timeout chair until it's over
4	Tell the child when the timeout is over. If the child was cooperative, thank them for that	It's up to the adult, not the child, to say when it's time to move on
5	Reconnect with the child	Praise good behavior, such as sharing with siblings

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Key steps

Timeouts are supposed to be boring, not scary or extremely punitive. Parents need to stay calm and quiet the whole time, saying only the bare minimum to children about each step.

Before making your child begin their timeout, explain clearly why they have to do one. For instance, you could briefly say, “You hit your sister, you’re going to a timeout.” Then walk your child to the timeout chair. I recommend using a quiet, boring location, rather than a room with lots of toys, filled with people or where a TV or another distracting device is on. It helps to use a sturdy chair suitable for grownups, rather than one designed for children because kid-sized chairs can be easily pushed over or even thrown by upset children.

Kids should spend one minute for each year of their age in the chair. There’s no evidence that making timeouts last any longer than that works better.

It’s OK if they get out of the chair, which does happen a lot. Parents can return their children to the chair, while staying calm and quiet. This might have to happen more than once because timeouts are boring by design and not all children can stand being bored.

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The disciplinary technique can reduce aggression and help get children to follow family rules. Brooke Fasani Auchincloss/The Image Bank via Getty Images

Timeouts improve kids' behavior if you do them the right way

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With parents spending more time with their children than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their need for discipline that works is greater than ever. Fortunately, there are some proven techniques.

As a developmental psychologist, I believe that anyone raising little kids could learn how to better use timeouts. This disciplinary technique is among the best ways to stop frustrating child behavior, like not listening, breaking family rules or being overly aggressive.

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PYCC Timeout Part 1



Following all the required steps is essential.

Incorrect and incomplete information

Psychologists have encouraged parents, other guardians and frequent caregivers to use timeouts, which are generally appropriate for children between the ages of 2 and 5, **since the 1960s**.

During timeouts, parents and other guardians briefly stop paying attention to their child and make the child sit quietly and calm down. Timeouts are meant to halt misbehavior and get children to stop acting out in the future.

Researchers have found over and over that **timeouts generally work well** – as long as parents and other primary caregivers consistently follow five specific steps.

The trouble is, much of the information available on the internet and through other channels is inaccurate or incomplete.

When a team of scholars **reviewed about 100 websites**, they found that not one of them included every essential step. So it shouldn't be surprising that other researchers have found that **most parents who use timeouts fail to follow them all**.

Another problem is that timeouts aren't appropriate for all forms of misbehavior. They're best reserved for when kids behave aggressively, when they break things, or when they refuse to follow directions that makes them unsafe. For instance, your child hitting his brother or sister would be an appropriate reason to give a timeout. But tantrums, whining and talking back are not. **Parents should try other strategies**, such as ignoring the child for these behaviors.

What's more, I do not recommend them at school, where, although there has not yet been conclusive research, I believe that other strategies work better.

Instead of using timeouts whenever a child misbehaves, adults should try other techniques, such as ignoring minor misbehavior, and consider if they can improve on how they react when a child misbehaves.

For parents and other guardians, that means making sure that their children's days are filled with happy and fun **"time in."** Parents can accomplish this by devoting at least 10 minutes a day to one-on-one play with their children. Parents should also be on the lookout for children's good behavior and praise all the wonderful things their children do.

Kids should know which kinds of misbehavior will lead to timeouts, where they'll have to go during timeouts and how long they'll last. Parents should explain what will happen during timeouts when everyone is calm and happy, using a stuffed animal to demonstrate each step.