

## TIME-IN TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN

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When children show signs of emotional dysregulation, they really need the help of caring adults to calm and quiet themselves. Common symptoms of emotional upset in young children include hitting, crying, throwing, withdrawing, bullying and oppositional behaviors. The most important thing to remember in these situations is that emotionally upset children have some problem that they are not able to resolve within themselves. They need adults to both help them identify the problem and to help them fix it. In this context, the idea of “discipline” is not a useful or helpful place from which to begin. A more effective approach begins with an attitude of “what does this child need and how can I help meet this need?”

The first step in helping a young child return to calm, harmonious behavior is supporting them both emotionally and energetically. Adults who are bonded to a child are the most effective in doing this, as children will attune only to adult caregivers who they trust will meet their needs. The most effective tool for reestablishing this connection is known as *time-in*. This involves placing children physically on or near to an adult for a period of time and providing calming words and sounds, empathetic facial signals, touch and firm but loving limits. The following charts describe several varieties of *time-in* that can be used with young children.

### LAP TIME-IN: AGES 1 – 3

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children who are hitting, biting, throwing toys or who are too upset to follow directions.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Kathleen Gray, child development specialist at the University of California - Davis
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ask the child to stop the problem behavior. If this does not work, then gently control the child by placing your hand on their shoulder or thigh.</li><li>2. If this does not work, then pick up the child and walk away from the scene. Sit down in a quiet place and hold the toddler on your lap. Say, “You seem upset. Let me help you quiet yourself.”</li><li>3. Become an ally to the child. Talk about what just happened, indicating that you understand the circumstances surrounding the child’s behavior.</li><li>4. Describe your limits regarding the problem behavior and stress the standard you will maintain on it. (“Children are not allowed to hit each other here. If you hit, I will stop you and you will sit on my lap until you can stop hitting.”)</li><li>5. Even very young children understand the tone of your words and the meaning behind them.</li></ol>
<b>Dos and don’ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Make eye contact with the child if this is culturally appropriate.</li><li>2. Speak firmly, calmly, respectfully and kindly to establish your authority.</li><li>3. When physically engaging a child, avoid grabbing, jerking and using other forms of physical disrespect.</li><li>4. If child refuses to sit on your lap for a short time, indicate via a firm touch and a firm voice that “You may not get up yet because you are still upset and not ready to play with other children. You need to sit on my lap until you can quiet yourself.”</li><li>5. This affirms the goal (self-quieting) and that the child is not being punished.</li><li>6. The more that you use gentle but firm touch, the more that the child will comprehend your message and attune with you.</li></ol>

**SIT IN A CHAIR TIME-IN**  
**AGES 2 1/2 – 6**

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children who need help building internal structure.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Donna Corwin, Beverly Hills, CA author and mother.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pull a chair <u>close to you</u> and have the child sit in it so that she is looking at a blank wall.</li> <li>2. Apply a hand lotion containing lavender oil to the child's hands. This physical contact plus the lavender in the lotion will help to calm her.</li> <li>3. While applying the lotion, tell her that you want to help her become more calm and to help her learn the rules. Ask her if she knows what rule she has broken.</li> <li>3. Once she understands the broken rule, she must sit quietly in the chair for a specified number of minutes. Use one minute per year of age. During this time, she is encouraged to calm her self and to think about why she broke the rule so that she will remember it in the future.</li> <li>4. Set a timer for the specified amount of time.</li> <li>5. During the time that she is sitting close to you, quiet yourself, touch her and surround her with "quiet energy."</li> <li>6. When the timer rings, ask the child if she is quiet yet. If not, set the timer again. Once she is quiet, ask her to repeat the rule and what she will do differently in the future.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don'ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use the same chair and place in same place in the room each time.</li> <li>2. Using the timer indicates your seriousness about the need to quiet and the rule.</li> <li>3. If she gets up, reseat her firmly, gently and respectfully.</li> <li>4. Avoid showing anger by raising your voice. Be calm and firm.</li> <li>5. Do not talk about her misbehavior with others if your child is within earshot. This is considered shaming and public humiliation.</li> </ol>

**REFLECTIVE TIME-IN:**  
**AGES 3 – 6**

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children who won't follow directions, wander off, leave a group activity or act out while eating.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	William Sears, pediatrician in San Clemente, CA and father of eight children.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When child misbehaves, walk with her to a couch or to adjacent chairs. Make sure this spot has no distractions such as a television or games. Sit down with the child.</li> <li>2. Ask what is upsetting him and repeat back what you hear. Then offer your sympathy and also reaffirm the need for him to be in charge of his behavior (limits.)</li> <li>3. If a rule has been broken, ask if he knows which one. Inform him if he doesn't.</li> <li>4. Tell him you will sit with him while he thinks about his behavior. Allow one minute for each year of age.</li> <li>5. Set a timer for this period.</li> <li>6. When the timer rings, ask if he feels quiet yet. If so, ask him to restate the rule.</li> <li>7. Once he can do this, affirm to him that you believe he can quiet himself, remember the rule and follow it in the future without needing a time-in.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don'ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Once a child can quiet himself and can identify the role he has broken, do not belabor the point.</li> <li>2. The goal is to help the child self-regulate and to internalize the rule, which will help them develop a conscience.</li> <li>3. Repeated lectures and belaboring the point can make children "deaf."</li> </ol>

**NO TIME LIMIT TIME-IN  
AGES 2 – 10**

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children who demonstrate some degree of self-discipline and emotional self-regulation. This teaches children self-control rather than needing adults to serve as “policemen.”
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Charlotte Petersen, child psychologist in Eugene, Oregon.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a place where children can sit in a neutral environment that is either on or by you. There should be no toys or other things to play with.</li> <li>2. When a child behaves in an unacceptable way (throwing toys around in anger), clearly state what you want him to do. (“I want you to pick up all these toys now.”) and give one warning: (“If you choose not to pick them up, it will tell me that you need to sit by me in the time-in seat.”)</li> <li>3. Once the child is seated in the time-in seat, say “You need to sit here by me until you are quiet and ready to . . .”</li> <li>4. Surround the child with “quiet energy” and attune with their energy.</li> <li>5. Allow the child to know when they are ready to get up. Observe their behavior after this to make sure that they are re-regulated. If not, kindly repeat this process until they are.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don’ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. With this form of time-in, never say to the child, “Okay, you can get up now.”</li> <li>2. Allow the child a period of time to sit quietly.</li> <li>3. If the child leaves the seat, simply ask “Are you quiet and ready to . . .?”</li> <li>4. If the child says “no,” then say, “Oops. You aren’t allowed to get up until you are quiet and ready to . . . You can get up whenever you are ready to . . .”</li> </ol>

**TALK IT OUT TIME-IN  
AGES 2 – 10**

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children who are well-bonded to their adult caregivers and are sensitive, highly verbal and can compromise without difficulty.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Colin Green, New York city author and father of three.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After an interaction between an adult and child such as rudeness or thoughtlessness, say “Let’s go for a walk and talk about what just happened.”</li> <li>2. Hugging, talking, touching and creating physical closeness will get your point across more effectively. This approach also emphasizes your emotional connection to the child and the value that you place on your relationship with the child.</li> <li>3. In contrast, punishment that causes an emotional disconnect and aggravates the child’s emotional dysregulation.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don’ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When a child is having a difficult time, what she needs is more contact with you rather than isolation.</li> <li>2. Taking time to discuss relationship conflicts and problems in private improves children’s trust in adult caregivers and models honoring in relationships. It also says that your love is constant.</li> </ol>

**COOLING OFF TIME-IN**  
**AGES 3 – 6**

<b>Works best for:</b>	For children and adult caregivers who need time to cool off following rowdy, disruptive behavior.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Evonne Weinhaus, family counselor in St. Louis and mother of three.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When a child misbehaves, say, “I can see that you are out of control. Please come and sit by me so that I can help you can get quiet.”</li> <li>2. Let her decide how long she needs to become quiet. <b>OR</b></li> <li>3. If the adult is the one who is out of control, say “I am getting out of control and I need a time-in. I am going to sit quietly with myself until I can get quiet. I don’t want to say something that I don’t mean and hurt someone. I will talk to you again after I get myself quiet.” This kind of modeling is perhaps the <b>most</b> important tool for teaching emotional self-regulation.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don’ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When the time-in is over, avoid a big dramatic scene involving joyful embraces and hugs. This can be perceived as a “payoff” or reward for misbehaving and getting attention.</li> <li>2. This normalizes the process of emotional self-regulation.</li> </ol>

**CREATIVE PLAY TIME-IN**  
**AGES 5 – 10 YEARS+**

<b>Works best for:</b>	Children, particularly boys, who are more able to think things through while engaging in other activities.
<b>Adapted from:</b>	Robin Scott Walker, a child and family counselor from Woodland Hills, California.
<b>How to do it:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use manipulative activities such as crafts, paints, artwork or building with Legos to help the child express his feelings. Have the child do these activities in proximity of an monitoring adult.</li> <li>2. When it is clear that he has had time to do something constructive with his energy, sit and talk with him.. Ask him to tell you a story about the picture or Lego structure.</li> <li>3. Use the story as a way of helping him process his feelings and to reflect on his behavior in the problem caused by the time out.</li> </ol>
<b>Dos and don’ts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This technique works well for distracting, disruptive behavior such as squabbling and bickering with other children.</li> <li>2. This activity is not an appropriate for serious behavior problems such as scribbling on the living room walls. For this kind of infraction, hand your child a sponge and bucket and have him clean up the mess.</li> <li>3. Avoid using eating, drinking, TV and video games as distractions.</li> <li>4. This strategy imprints children with behaviors that can become addictive.</li> </ol>