

## TIME-OUT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

**Recognize that time-out should be used after other more “positive” techniques have already been attempted**, such as the systematic use of reinforcement of appropriate behavior, as well as other less restrictive punitive techniques have been used (e.g., response cost). When used, it should be used in combination with techniques designed specifically to teach and reinforce appropriate behavior.

**Recognize that “time-out” can occur in different settings, varying in degree of restrictiveness and depending on such factors as the severity of the behavior, the age of the student, and availability of the different settings.** The least restrictive form of time-out is time-out in the regular classroom (called *inclusionary time-out*), in which the student is allowed to observe but not actively participate. The student might remain in his or her seat or be moved to the perimeter of the learning activity. A more restrictive, and more common, form of time-out (call *exclusionary time-out*) is moving the student away from the learning activity, such as to a corner of the room, hallway, or study carrel, where he or she cannot participate in or observe the learning activity. The most restrictive form of time-out, and the most common, is *seclusionary time-out* in which the student is removed to another room. Because of the forced removal of the student from teacher, peers, and the educational activity, and the loss of instructional time, this is the most restrictive and intrusive form of time-out and, therefore, its use with students is heavily regulated with numerous procedural safeguards.

**Use time-out durations that are brief;** typical durations are from 1 to 5 minutes per episode, depending on the developmental age of the student. There is *no* evidence of greater effectiveness with time-out periods longer than 15 minutes, they are more difficult to enforce, and they are more vulnerable to a student finding sources of unplanned reinforcement.

**Ensure that the physical features and conditions of the time-out location are safe.**

**Monitor the student continuously while he or she is in the time-out situation.**

**The following steps are recommended in the use of time-out:**

1. Assess the degree to which the student is being reinforced in the classroom for appropriate academic and social behavior. The classroom must be the place where good things happen; that is, where teaching and lessons are meaningful and engaging and there is a much greater proportion of affirmation and praise than friction and frustration.
2. Assess the degree to which the intended time-out situation makes reinforcers available to the student for misbehaviors. The time-out situation must *not* be reinforcing. The critical aspect in effective time-out is a noticeable difference in available reinforcement between time-in and time-out.

3. Decide upon the duration of the time-out periods for this particular student; they should not vary according to which misbehavior he displays. Decide upon the amount of “quiet time” (i.e., time that he is calm and composed) to complete the time-out requirements and be returned to time-in. Don’t tell the student to come out “when you are ready to behave”.
4. Consider issuing a warning to the student, at the early signs of the problem behavior, that a time-out episode is imminent if he does not quickly re-engage in the appropriate task at hand. A warning should be brief and unemotional. Students who receive such warnings typically experience fewer time-out episodes. Do not wait until the student is out of control.
5. When the student performs the misbehavior, initiate the time-out manipulation of the environment or displacement of the student immediately and consistently. In a calm neutral tone, identify the misbehavior (e.g., "You are fighting; go to the time-out room"). Often, this is the point at which a student will defend his actions, protest, or demand a reason for time-out. Again, explanations to the student should be brief and unemotional. To adhere to the principle of time-out, teacher-student interactions should be reserved for time-in.
6. Whenever possible, do not release the student from time-out because of any inappropriate behaviors that he performs while in time-out. Otherwise, you will have set up a situation that effectively reinforces the student for misbehaving while in time-out. Some teachers add a brief, fixed amount of time to the time-out period if the student engages in such behaviors.
7. After the student has fulfilled the “quiet time” requirement at the end of the time-out period, return the student's access to reinforcers (i.e., release him from time-out *without* great fanfare) ... but look for an early opportunity to reinforce some appropriate behavior that he performs in the learning situation. The teacher should accentuate that *this* is the place where good things happen and thereby increase his motivation to stay.
8. When the student is calm and composed during the time-out period, consider discussing with him or her social problem-solving strategies for handling the situation that resulted in the time-out consequence. The use of this technique *within* a time-out period has not yet received much research attention. Indeed, some authorities expressly reject it. Under some circumstances, however, it seems reasonable at least to consider this period as an advantageous time for such discussions. If these discussions, however, undermine the fundamental principle of time-out, that is, if the student engages in the problem behavior to obtain these personal discussions, then of course revert to the basic time-out period.

From: Cavalier, A. R.(in press). Behavior reduction techniques for correcting misbehavior. In G. G. Bear, *Developing self-discipline and preventing and correcting misbehavior*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

© Allyn & Bacon. Do not re-produce without citing source, or obtaining permission of the publisher.

**Additional Resources:**

Marlow, A., Tingstrom, D., Olmi, D., & Edwards, R. (1997). The effects of classroom-based time-in/time-out on compliance rates in children with speech/language disabilities. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 19*(2), 1-15.

Taylor, J. & Miller, M. (1997). When timeout works some of the time: The importance of treatment integrity and functional assessment. *School Psychology Quarterly, 12*(1), 4-22.

Turner, H. & Watson, T. (1999). Consultant's guide for the use of time-out in the preschool and elementary classroom. *Psychology in the Schools, 36*(2), 135-148.

[http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/pub/eres/EDSPC715\\_MCINTYRE/TimeOut.html](http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/pub/eres/EDSPC715_MCINTYRE/TimeOut.html):  
Time Out Procedures

<http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/bi/TO.html>: Effective Use of Time Out