

Using “Time Out” for Discipline

Rona Renner, RN

How you discipline is often based on how your parents disciplined you, your culture, and your parenting style. Discipline can be done in a respectful way that communicates that you want your child to learn right from wrong. You can discipline without losing control and yelling. Here’s one way to offer love and limits.

“Time outs” are a well-accepted and effective alternative to hitting and yelling. They are used by parents and teachers to help children calm down and learn to manage their behavior. It’s also a way for adults who are feeling angry to cool off and get some distance from a child when a situation is getting out of control.

There are different ways to do time out, and please adapt what is suggested to fit your style. A sensitive child might have a very strong reaction to being sent to her room for a time out, and a young child may have trouble separating from his parents. In these situations you can use a time out chair or the bottom step of a staircase for time out.

The following method will work for most children, but if you have trouble check with your pediatrician.

Maria (age 4): “Daddy I want more ice cream! Please daddy, please!”

Father: “No honey, you’ve had lots of sweets today.”

Maria: “No, I want more ice cream (*yelling*).”

Father: “Maria, if you keep asking you won’t have any tomorrow. Stop yelling.”

Maria: *Yelling.* “ I want more ice cream!”

Father: “That’s enough. If you don’t stop you’ll go to your room for a time out.”

Maria doesn’t stop, just gets louder.

Father: *Takes Maria and timer to her room.* “You’ll have a 4 minute time out. I know you’re disappointed, but you need to listen when I say no. When you’re done we’ll have that walk we were going to take.”

Maria cries.

Father: “Come down stairs when the timer dings, I’ll be waiting.”

Father walks away and Maria whimpers a bit and stops crying.

When the time out is over, father doesn’t hold a grudge and soon gives her positive attention and affection.

Maria knows why she’s getting a time out. She cools off from her yelling, and father keeps himself from engaging in a yelling match. He wants to teach her not to yell when she can’t have her way. If he’s consistent she’ll learn to stop herself from yelling when her father says “No.”

For discipline information and to order a book or video of *1-2-3- Magic*, by Dr. Thomas Phelan, in Spanish or English, go to www.parentmagic.com.