

Provider Tip of the Week

February 23, 2022

Time-Outs

Time-outs are an often misunderstood and misused technique for discipline. Thinking of time-outs as a pause in behavior can help to reframe them as an opportunity to promote self-regulation, not to punish. Here are a few ways to explain time-outs to caregivers:

1. Time-outs should be thought of as body breaks. When children over the age of 2 are not in control of their body – and are physically hurting others – a body break can help them to gain the space to calm down.
2. Time-outs should be short, from 30-60 seconds, and should not require children to reflect on their negative behavior. Time-outs can look like a few deep breaths that allow a child to step out of the “red zone” and get back to a place where they can hear you and gain control.
3. Time-outs are not a replacement for caregiver soothing. While children may need a break in the moment, they also need adults to calm down. Model how a child can take a few breaths, walk away from the source of their distress, and then return to make a better choice. Time-outs do not need to be done alone.
4. Make a calm corner for time-outs. Caregivers can pick a few calming items - like a book, stuffed animal, bean bag or comfy chair - and create a calming space. This “corner” can be a great place to use anytime a toddler wants a break – and to use for a body break. Make it calming, pleasant and soothing. Not sterile or punitive.
5. Practicing time-outs with stuffed animals can be a great way to introduce this concept. Caregivers can explain, “Sometimes when our bodies get out of control, we need a few seconds to calm down. When that happens, we are going to come over to this bean bag, take a few deep breaths or count to 10, and then make a plan for what to do next. Let’s try it with your bear. What do you think they may be feeling upset about? When would they need a body break?”

See this video for more information:



Watch the Video!

Provider Tips powered by the Keystones of Development curriculum, login at parenting.mountsinai.org/providers/ to learn more.