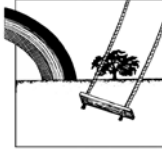


Valley Oak Children's Services



Early Childhood Education Services

TIME OUT: IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

As those of us who live and work with children have become aware of the dangers of physical punishment, alternative means of dealing with disruptive behaviors have emerged. **Time out** is an alternative that is widely used with children ages 2-12. Parents, child care providers and various other professionals have come to depend on time out to help alleviate problem behaviors. Although many of us are somewhat familiar with what time out is and what purpose it means to serve, it may be helpful to discuss two different approaches that are recommended by professionals who advocate the use of this disciplinary tool. Also, it is important to be aware that there are those who do not believe that time out is a viable alternative to an authoritarian approach to discipline.

One source of information (Lynn Clark, Ph.D.: The Time Out Solution) regarding time out explains it as a "brief interruption of activities for the child and time out from reinforcement, rewards and attention." This definition stems from the work of psychologist B.F. Skinner and his theory of operant conditioning. The basic premise of the theory asserts that children will behave in certain ways if they receive rewards for doing so (positive reinforcement) and that undesirable behavior can be diminished by withholding rewards or evoking punishment. This source recommends that the adult "quickly remove the child from the reinforcing or pleasurable situation in which the misbehavior occurs and briefly place her in a quiet and boring area that is not reinforcing or enjoyable at all." The idea here is that children experience immediate losses when placed in time out. They lose attention from their family. They lose power, control and the ability to

anger and upset their parents. They also lose the freedom to play or to join in activities. This source also states that, "The time out method is effective in correcting bad behavior because kids hate being in time out. Many children prefer to get a spanking or a severe scolding rather than briefly being placed in a time out."

Another professional source (Jane Nelsen and H. Stephen Glenn; Time Out—Abuses and Effective Uses) maintains that, "A basic principle of Adlerian psychology – the philosophy of maintaining dignity and respect for all human beings – must be incorporated before time out can be used as an effective, encouraging experience that helps children, instead of an experience that creates humiliation and loss of dignity and respect." This approach concurs with Rudolph Dreikur's belief that there are four inappropriate or mistaken goals children adopt as a rationale for misbehaving. The fundamental premise of this approach to time out asserts that the primary goal of all behavior is to find a sense of belonging and significance. Consequently, the belief is that misbehaving children are discouraged children and that they need encouragement so they won't feel the need to misbehave. In contrast to the previous point of view, this source ascertains that the number one criteria for effective time out is that it be used to help children feel better, not to make them feel worse. This approach encourages adults to explain to children (beforehand) that we all have times when we lose control of our behavior, feel upset or find ourselves in a bad mood and at these times, it can be helpful to sit quietly and wait until we feel better. Children may be allowed to decide where they will take their time out and when they are ready to rejoin

the others. It is believed that by using these guidelines, children are empowered with a sense of self-control and that adults miss this point when they force children into time out, try to make them feel ashamed and maintain control of when they can leave time out. Sometimes children are encouraged to be involved in planning ways to make time out a positive rather than a negative experience.

Other educators, psychologists and parents feel that although time out appears less harmful than spanking or yelling (because it does not involve physical or verbal abuse) it may not be as innocent as it seems. They view time out as an emotionally harmful way to discipline children and are dismayed that the withholding of love and attention has persisted as an acceptable means of control. The opponents of time out are concerned that children are isolated and ignored; left alone to interpret their time out experience as rejection. And, they believe that these children are always aware that they may be subjected to further deprivation or penalty. They worry that feelings of insecurity, anxiety, confusion, anger, humiliation and low self-esteem may result, especially if the child is under the age of seven and does not have the capability to

process language the way adults do.

These opponents of time out argue that holding children who are out of control is much more effective than silencing and/or isolating them. They believe that when adults prepare comfortable environments for children, schedule events with the child's needs in mind, demonstrate coping skills and be clear about rules, they are able to prevent and avoid many problem behaviors. And, they point out the paradoxical; that children are most in need to loving attention when they act least deserving of it.

This is small amount of information on a popular and extensively studied topic. We recognize that those of us who live and work with children face a challenging task when it comes to disciplining them. We want children to cooperate and learn self-control and we know that many variables come into play when determining which discipline approach feels right. Time out is one option.

We encourage you to use our lending library for more information on children and discipline.

Please feel free to call or come on in!