

USE OF TIME OUT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Time out is a common technique for guiding behavior. Time out is not meant to punish, shame, embarrass, or humiliate someone. When someone loses control, it is a place to regain control and think. At its best, time out is a place to give children and youth a moment to cool down before resolving a conflict or talk about their behavior.

When children are younger, time out is a way to interrupt destructive or out-of-control behavior – basically to make a child stop what he or she is doing and direct their attention in a more positive direction. In this way, children are directed to sit in a chair or a space apart from others until they calm down and can re-join the group.

As children grow and develop, this type of time out becomes less effective. As we know, youth and older school-age children see the world differently than younger children. Young children think only about themselves, while older children and youth increasingly see how their actions can affect others. Simply separating them from others and then inviting them back does not help them think through what happened and make the necessary connections. With this in mind, here are some suggestions for using time out with children at youth:

School Age Children: A “Peace Place”

When children get very upset, they can get into a “fight or flight” mode. This means they may react by “fighting” (e.g. hitting, calling names, throwing things, kicking, yelling) or “fleeing” (e.g. running away from the program, hiding under a table). Neither of these reactions is very useful when dealing with frustration, anger, or other emotion. It may help the child feel better at that moment, but does not help them learn how to process and manage their feelings in order to work through conflict.

A Peace Place can be a useful tool for helping children work through conflict. It is a space that is in an out-of-the-way area and filled with items that can help someone calm down. Examples of calming tools are: soft cloth or stuffed animals to hold, pictures to look at, music to listen to (with headphones), stress balls to hold, art materials (clay, crayons and paper), a sturdy and unbreakable mirror to look at oneself, bubbles.

A Peace Place is most effective when it is introduced to the children when they are calm. Discuss the purpose of the Peace Place and emphasize that it is not a punishment, but a place for people to calm down. Ask the children about things that help them calm down and put those items in the Peace Place. Children can choose to go the Peace Place when they are feeling anxious, frustrated, or angry. They may be asked to go to the Peace Place by an adult to calm down before talking about a conflict or their behavior. Place a timer in the Peace Place for the child to set for him or herself. When the timer goes off, she or he can either re-set it for more time, or invite you or the other people involved to join him or her for a discussion.

It takes time to learn how to use the Peace Place effectively. Don’t give up on it if children go there and, in their anger, throw things or even break things. After they are calm, you can help them clean things up and discuss how it could be used differently next time. When learning to manage one’s emotions there are many hurdles along the way.

Youth: Meditation/Mediation Corner

Learning to remain calm in the face of anger, frustration, and disruption is a lifelong process. Youth are in a unique place in their lives when they are still developing emotionally and do not yet have the adult ability to fully think things through. Many times they will react without thinking rather than responding in a measured way.

Talk with youth about what makes them frustrated and what triggers their anger. Triggers are usually connected to previous experiences. It may be that we feel we have been treated unfairly, are angry about something else, or are acting out of fear. How do they usually react when angry?

Inform them that when something triggers our anger, we have a very short period of time (about 8 seconds) before we react without thinking and go into a fight or flight response. When this happens, we have a high chance of doing or saying something we regret later; but, if we act quickly (within those 8 seconds), we can do something to calm ourselves down. Spend some time talking about strategies to calm down when a trigger occurs. Examples include: Counting to 10, taking deep breaths, walking away for a moment, closing one's eyes and focusing on something else, singing to yourself, or listening to music.

With youth, design a corner with comfortable seating that contains ways for people to calm down or meditate when they are angry and need a place to go before doing or saying something they may regret later. Create posters to remind people about what the space is for and have both strategies written and tools available to calming down.

Another important element of the Meditation/Mediation Corner is a way for youth to think through what has happened. Developmentally, they are able to see how they affect the world, and how the world affects them. When someone goes to the corner, give them a way to journal or draw about what happened. Include a list of questions for them to consider, such as "What happened?" "What was your part in it?" "What did others say or do to affect you?" "What did you say or do that affected others?" "How could it have been handled differently?" "What needs to happen to fix or mend the situation?"

This corner can also be used to mediate conflicts or disputes between youth. If two or more people have an argument or ongoing grudge, they can either decide to talk it out on their own or get help from an adult or a peer to resolve it. The Meditation/Mediation Corner is a great space for this type of activity.



Using a Peace Place and Meditation/Mediation Corner changes the whole focus of time out. It becomes less of a way to punish or control, and more of a way to learn how to manage one's emotions and navigate relationships with others.

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