

TIME 'IN' VS TIME 'OUT'



BEING A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY

All carers are tasked with guiding children, which includes responding to misbehaviour. How this is done though, can impact a child's ongoing wellbeing and understanding of the world. Time out is a common method used by adults to respond to a misbehaving child. But, for children who have experienced trauma, time out can be detrimental to their wellbeing, and carers will usually find time out quickly stops being effective.

Behaviours are communication

All behaviours have a meaning, serve a purpose and communicate a child's need at that moment. Sometimes though, the need behind a child's behaviour can be at odds with how the behaviour looks or sounds. Hitting, swearing and damaging property may not be communicating 'Go away' or 'I hate you', but instead 'I need help managing my emotions', 'I don't understand' or 'I don't feel safe'.

Time out and time in are two methods used to respond to a child's misbehaviour. While their initial intent is similar, their approach and impact on a child are very different.

What is time out, and why you should avoid it

Time out is the method of removing a child from a situation and isolating them, telling them to 'reflect on their behaviour'. Time out **only** responds to the behaviour of the child, and not the **underlying reason** the child may be trying to communicate, such as their feelings or needs.

Time out also works on the basis the child can make a **connection** between their actions and the consequence of being isolated and unsupported. By placing the child in time out, it is assumed the child will be able to regulate their emotions on their own without the support from their carer.

Time out is usually **not** recommended because the child can interpret their feelings as bad and that they can't be around other people when they have them. For children who experienced trauma, this can also reinforce their sense of themselves as being bad and leave them feeling ashamed and abandoned.

Time in: A better alternative

Time in also serves the purpose of having a child reflect on their behaviour, however how this is done is different.

Time in is where the child is **supported** by their carer to regulate their emotions and make them feel better when they are upset and behaving in a heightened state. Instead of sending the child to be **alone** with their feelings of anger, guilt, or shame over what has happened, carers **model** a calm state and support the child to process and work through their feelings together.

Carers who support children through **big feelings**, are teaching the child in their care they can come to them when they are feeling overwhelmed, instead of teaching them to hide their feelings or that they must deal with these feelings on their own – which often the child is not equipped to do and can lead to further misbehaviour.

How you can help

Here are some tips you can use to encourage **time in** if a child is misbehaving:

- ★ How you are feeling? You may need to step away for a moment to ensure you are feeling calm to be able to support the child. An emotionally heightened adult cannot support a child to regulate their own emotions.
- ★ When you are calm, sit near the child in the same room, or hold the child if they are happy with this. Reassure them you are there, using a calm soothing voice – 'I am here, and these feelings will pass'.
- ★ Reassure the child that you love them, and even though they made a mistake, they are still important and loved.
- ★ Use calming strategies, like breathing exercises, blowing bubbles, swinging on a swing or bouncing on a trampoline.
- ★ Don't discuss the incident until the child is calm and reconnected with you. Once they are settled, you can discuss how they were feeling, what they were trying to tell you and how they can do things differently if they feel the same way again.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:

- > www.parentlink.act.gov.au/parenting-guides/babies-toddlers-and-young-children/time-in-or-time-out
- > Siegal, D., & Bryson, T. (2014). *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. Brunswick, Victoria: Scribe Publications.
- > Source images: Freepik.com (pch.vector)



LEARN MORE