

## Why 'Time-out' does not work

### Time-out

Time-out refers to an old-fashioned intervention technique in which a child who has demonstrated antisocial behaviour is directed by an adult to a special area where they will calm down, become quiet and bored and reflect on their behaviour. In theory, this child will then feel compelled to make changes to their behaviour and return to perhaps apologise and make restitution.

This all sounds great in theory but many adults discover over time, that time-outs really don't work and make no real difference to a child's overall behaviour. Why is this?

This time-out technique focuses on what the child **should not** be doing rather than on what he or she **should be** doing. Using this technique, adults focus on what the child has done that is 'wrong' rather than on the behaviour tools needed to handle future challenges when the time-out is over. This is the reason why so many children return from the designated time-out area and simply continue with old behaviour patterns.

Time-out also has huge potential to be used as punishment—and often is. It can be a negative experience for a child if the adult uses time-out to vent frustration, or yell or use accusatory language. It is the adult's behaviour management skill, attitude and words that will distinguish a time-out from a punishment. Anger and resentment can result if a time-out is used as a form of humiliation or punishment. There is also the added problem of what to do when the child refuses to go for time-out. Such a scenario can escalate to the point where both adult and child are exhausted and very upset.



### Naughty Areas

The recent popularity of the British TV program where a 'super nanny' arrives on the doorstep of a troubled household armed with the technique of sending children to sit in a 'naughty area' indicates parents are really searching for information to help them better manage their child's behaviour.

#### Our issues with the Naughty Area

- Threatening a child with a naughty area, be it a mat, chair, step, corner etc. may force compliance in the instant but does not teach any new behaviour skills. What's more, children with serious behaviour problems will not sit on that mat or in any naughty area. What is the adult supposed to do then? Some aggressive children would rather throw, kick or knock over any naughty area rather than sit on it and cooperate. What does the adult do then? And what happens if and when your child won't stay on that naughty mat? Do you spend the next hour battling with him or her to sit in this special spot? There is a huge potential for this naughty mat technique to go wrong, for a child to get angry and oppose the adult and for things to escalate.

- Let's talk about using the word 'naughty'. Referring to an area as 'naughty' and calling a child 'naughty' is not helpful when you are dealing with children with low self-esteem and behaviour problems. This is name-calling and just reinforces to the child that they do have a problem with their behaviour. Name-calling *does absolutely nothing* to help a child with behaviour problems. In fact, we recommend that adults should be mature and controlled enough to refrain from name-calling and put-downs altogether.

- Placing a child on a naughty mat is a punishment. It's a simplistic, rudimentary technique that just sees the adult reacting to behaviour rather than changing it in any real or lasting way. Once the child has 'served the time' he or she is free to return to old patterns of behaviour. While this 'naughty area' technique may get some compliance in the short-term, there will be no real or lasting change because nothing new has been taught. And behaviour left unattended can and usually does, get worse. What will happen when this same child encounters problems and social challenges at school? Or becomes involved with other children with behaviour problems and peer pressure, or clashes with a teacher at school? Will the naughty mat still be used with a 10 year old?

- The naughty mat may simply teach some very young children what behaviours NOT to do, but to undergo long-term, genuine behavioural change, children must learn the interpersonal and social skills necessary to meet the demands of a variety of social situations well into their future.

**To conclude**

Parents and teachers who turn to time-out and 'naughty areas' do so in the hope that children will learn new behaviours and replace old behaviour with new ones. Unless these time-out and naughty areas start to teach, that's not going to happen. There is no getting away from it: for children to learn, they need to be taught. So rather than wasting time playing around with naughty mats and special spots and focusing children on what NOT TO DO, let's concentrate our efforts and energy on teaching them WHAT TO DO. Please put the naughty mat back in the cupboard where it belongs and focus on the job of skilled behaviour management.

**Let us help you**

Our Behaviour Management Package (below) and PowerPoint Presentation aims to give parents the behaviour management strategies they need to respond to oppositional behaviour and orchestrate change—all without resorting to time-outs, naughty mats or punishments!

*“Thank you for everything you have done to help Callum this year. I know in the beginning it was hard with his behaviour but he has come to love and respect you very much. He has calmed down so much since you have helped him. Thank you for everything you have done to boost Callum’s self esteem.”*  
 Melanie Stern, London UK

