



TIME OUT PROCEDURES¹

Child Development & Rehabilitation Center
Oregon Health & Science University



Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health therapist if needed.

Purpose: Use of time out procedures can be effective in decreasing or eliminating unwanted behavior problems in young children. To be most effective, the time out procedure often must be implemented in a specific way that creates a stark contrast between “time in” and “time out.” Also, to create consistency between home and school, it would best for all care providers to use similar procedures.

Time out should be used for: physically aggressive behaviors such as hitting, kicking, or pushing; non-compliance with specific, positively stated instructions.

Steps in time out:

1. Upon hitting, pushing, or engaging in some other physically aggressive act, the child should be briefly told why s/he is being put in time out (e.g., “You hit. Now you have to go to time out”) and then placed in time out immediately. **Say nothing else to him/her.** Avoid arguing with your child, or providing rationales as to why it’s better not to misbehave. Once s/he is in the time out chair, quickly walk away.

For noncompliance: Allow 5 seconds for your child to comply. If s/he doesn’t initiate compliance in that time frame, issue a warning (e.g., “You have 2 choices. You can either do what I told you to do, or go to time out”). If the child still does not comply after an additional five seconds, put him/her in time out.

2. An adult-sized chair should be used for time out. This makes it harder for your child to get out because his/her feet will not touch the ground. It’s best to choose a wooden or plastic chair without wheels, one that does not swivel or spin.
 - a). If s/he stays in the chair by himself, s/he should remain there for approximately 3 minutes (shorter for younger ages). During this time it is important that s/he remains in “time out,” meaning that care providers and other children should not talk to him/her. This will make it clearer to your child that s/he is being punished and will decrease the amount of attention that your child receives for misbehaving.
 - b). If your child gets up out of the chair, immediately place him/her back into the chair. Tell your child that s/he needs to stay in the chair until you tell him/her to get up. For some children, simply returning them back to the chair repeatedly helps teach them to stay. For others, a back-up to the time out chair may need to be considered. This could include you holding your child in the chair or restriction of privilege. It is important that you remain calm throughout this time so that s/he doesn’t get an emotional reaction.

**** Remember, no one should talk to your child while s/he is in time out.**

3. Once your child has sat in the chair for approximately three minutes (shorter for younger children), s/he may get up. Ask him/her if he is ready to get up.
 - a). If s/he indicates yes (e.g., says, “Yes” or reaches for your hand), allow him/her to get out of the chair and rejoin the group. Be looking for an opportunity to praise him/her for positive behavior.

- b). If s/he indicates no (e.g., says “No,” shakes head, does not respond at all), then restart the time out procedures.
- c). **For noncompliance**, your child should be ready to complete the initial instruction before getting out of the chair (e.g., “Are you ready to do what I told you?” If child indicates yes, s/he is able to get up). *This is a very important step for increasing compliance.*

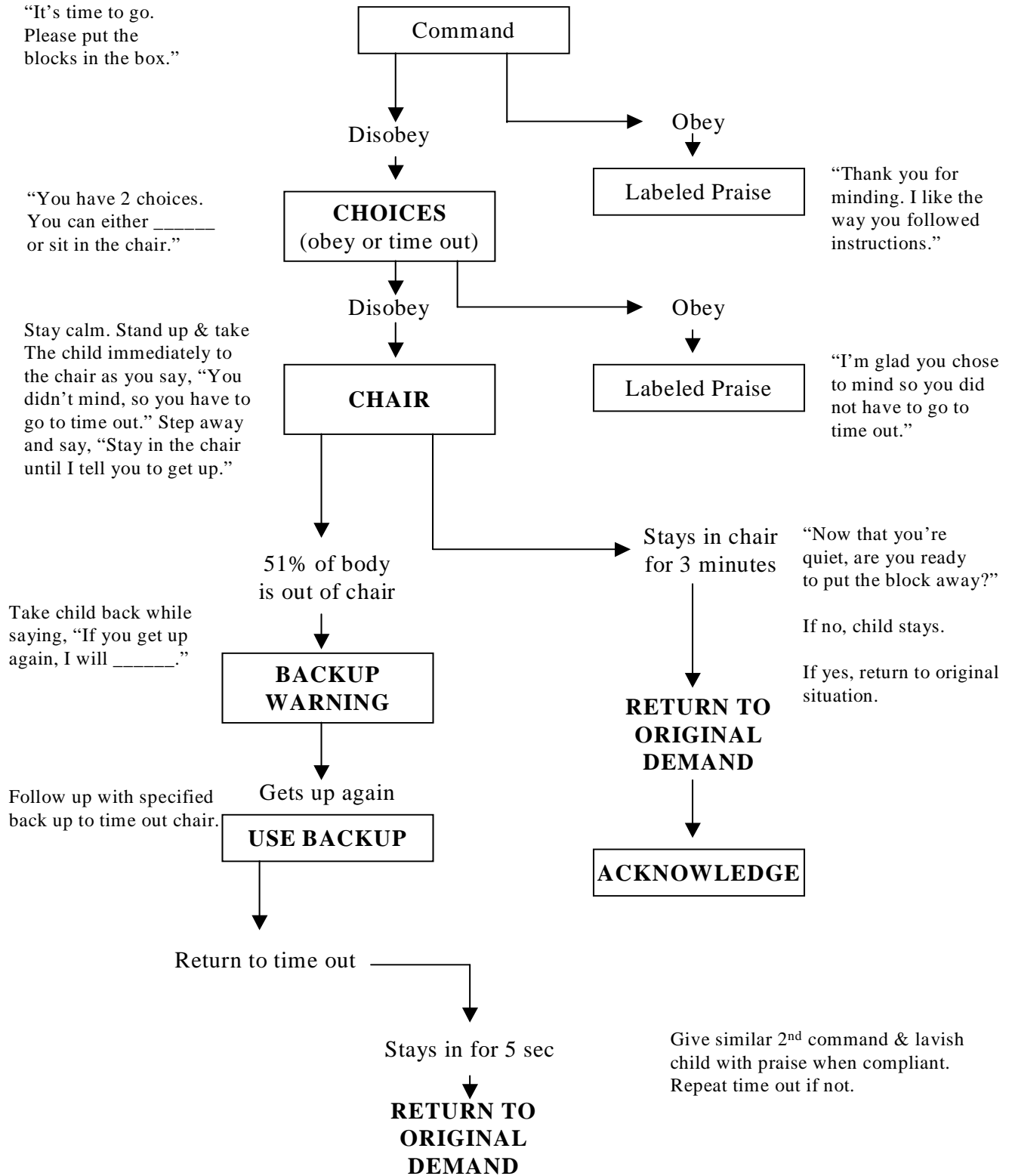
Other tips for making time out work:

1. Practice time out before you implement it. During a neutral time, demonstrate “good” time out behavior to your child. Then, have your child demonstrate it to you. Provide a small reward to your child for demonstrating such behavior.
2. Remember to stay calm during the entire procedure. The less reaction children get for their misbehavior, the better.
3. While children are in time out, make it appear as if you are indifferent to their misbehavior. Read a book, talk to another person, or just continue on with your routine.
4. When initially teaching your child to comply with time out, it may be necessary to simply count the time that s/he is sitting in the chair while not worrying about whether s/he is quiet. Remember, the first goal is to have your child learn to stay in the chair. Once your child demonstrates that s/he can stay in the chair, you can then shape “quiet” in the time out chair. Some children sit quietly in a chair and do not speak while in time out. Others may talk softly to themselves or fidget—this counts as quiet and calm. Others may be calming down from crying, but haven’t completely stopped—the sniffing that goes along with this should also be counted as quiet and calm.
5. Have a back-up plan for time out. For many children, the best back-up is to simply repeatedly place them back in time out if they are not sitting on their own ***without saying anything to them***. Eventually they will learn that they must remain in time out. Other options for back-ups to time out include sitting behind the time out chair and holding on to your child’s pant waist if they attempt to get up or removing a privilege that would come in the very near future (e.g., if you don’t stay in time out, then you won’t be able to have a sweet snack today).

¹ Adapted from :

Hebree-Kigen, T. L., & McNeil, C. B. (1995). *Parent-child interaction therapy*. New York: Plenum Press. & Barkley, R. A. (1997). *Defiant children: A clinician’s manual for assessment and parent training (2nd ed.)*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Time Out Procedures



Adapted from: Hebreo-Kigen, T. L., & McNeil, C. B. (1995). *Parent-child interaction therapy*. New York: Plenum Press.