

Time in: guiding children's behaviour



A 'time in' approach to guiding children's behaviour involves staying close to your child when they are overwhelmed with strong feelings. Staying connected helps them feel safe and secure, and to calm down. Children gradually learn to manage their own feelings and behaviour.

A 'time in' approach

Using a 'time in' approach means staying with your child when they have 'big' feelings and are having trouble managing their behaviour. It does not mean giving in to what they want or rewarding the behaviour you don't want. It is about staying connected with your child and letting them know you understand how they feel.

'Time in' creates the best situation for a child to gradually learn that strong feelings are OK and they can be managed. It is also a chance, once the emotional storm has passed, to talk about what happened and how to deal with things next time.

Staying with your child during 'time in' helps them:

- gradually learn how to calm themselves
- manage feelings such as fear, disappointment, frustration, jealousy or anger. They learn that while some emotions might not feel good they are nothing to be scared of, and they can be managed
- to feel safe – they learn that you will not abandon them or punish them when they are having trouble with feelings or behaviour
- learn that problems can be shared and solved.

Staying with your child when they have strong feelings or difficult behaviour sends the message that you love them no matter what.

What to do during 'time in'

When your child is out-of-control

- Stay calm and take charge. Your child needs you to be a wise and kind guide. This will help them to calm.
- Use holding, rocking and a soothing voice to settle young children. If your child does not want to be touched, stay close so they can come to you for comfort when ready.
- Let them know these feelings will pass and they will soon feel calm again.

When your child has calmed down

- Reassure them that you love them.
- Help them name their feelings. This is the first step in learning to manage them. When they have words to describe their feelings, they will have less need to act feelings out.
- Help them find the feeling that prompted the behaviour. Even though your child may seem angry or frustrated the feeling underneath may be fear, jealousy, disappointment or feeling powerless. They will gradually learn to understand all their feelings.
- Let them know you understand how they feel. You might say 'I can see you feel upset/angry/frustrated because...you really want that toy...want to go outside...want to go to your friend's house.....your feelings are hurt'.
- When children feel you really 'get them' (even if you don't agree) they are more ready to listen to you.
- Help them understand what happened and talk about the behaviour that is expected. Keep reasons short and simple. Young children can learn rules but they are not yet able to understand reason and logic. You might say 'I know you want to play with your brother's truck but it is not OK to hit him'.
- Tell and show your child what they can do next time. Help them learn the words they need to ask for what they want, and that they can come to you.



Be careful not to shame your child by making fun of them or telling them they are silly or naughty. This can hurt them and have ongoing impact.

Be patient – young children need lots of practice to learn what is expected.

Create a calm space in your home

It can help to create a 'calm space' in your home where children and adults can go to feel calm and relaxed. Don't call it 'time in' because your child may see it as where you go when you are 'bad'. Ask what they would like to have there to help them feel calm, eg soft toys, books, bean bags, blankets.

When you see your child getting upset, help prevent a meltdown by getting in early. You might say 'I can see you're upset because you want to play outside. Let's go to the calm space and work out what you can do until the rain stops'.

What about 'time out'?

'Time out' is often used by parents in response to a child's 'misbehaviour'. It involves removing an upset child from the situation and sending or taking them to a 'time out' place.

'Time out':

- leaves a child on their own to calm down and 'think about what they've done wrong'. It assumes they know the right way to do things and will remind themselves what to. However, children under three years don't have the skills to work out problems on their own. Children under six don't have the ability to reflect on their behaviour and understand what caused it. It doesn't teach your child what to do, just what not to do
- does not help a child learn how to manage strong feelings and out-of-control behaviour
- can send a message that big feelings are 'bad'. Children often 'push down' upset feelings so they can leave 'time out' rather than learn to manage them. The feelings may show up in other ways, eg by becoming rebellious, defiant, withdrawn or anxious, or showing signs of stress such as stomach pains or sleep problems
- can encourage battles because the child often feels a sense of injustice at being sent away. They can feel angry or hurt and not think about how to 'do better'
- may trigger a child's fear of being left alone. They can forget why they are there because they feel abandoned.

If you feel stressed, take some time to calm down. Remind yourself that children are still learning and need lots of practice to get things right. Make sure your child is safe and go to another room or outside for a short while until you feel better. Come back when you say you will. If this happens a lot, draw on people or services that can support you.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child health and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon to Fri for an appointment. The child health nurses can talk with you about your child's development and behaviour www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Tantrums', 'Living with toddlers', 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour: 2-12 years', 'Milestones: 0-4 years', 'Sleep: 0-6 years' and 'Feeding toddlers' www.parenting.sa.gov.au



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South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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