

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Time Out to Calm Down

In our Incredible Years sessions, we're finally beginning to tackle how we can effectively discipline our children. But I'm not going to tell you how to do it here ... Sorry! This is because the way that we use Time Out to Calm Down in Incredible Years is very different from the way that parents may have used it previously, or seen it modelled elsewhere. It takes a whole two and a half hour session to even begin to unlearn some behaviours and completely rethink others and I can't do justice to that in one short article. What I can do is give you some ideas to consider ...



Using punishments to try and modify children's behaviour is not effective. Instead, it is far better to motivate in positive ways, giving lots of attention, praise and rewards for good behaviours, whilst trying to ignore low-level negative behaviour. The Incredible Years course uses the principle of parents building up an emotional "bank account" with deposits of love, support and understanding. Occasionally, when we see behaviour we really can't ignore we may need to make a "withdrawal" using Time Out to Calm Down.

Time Out to Calm Down should be saved for behaviours, such as hitting, kicking, biting or for refusing to follow instructions. It is an ethical approach to discipline and a non-violent response to conflict, which encourages our children to take responsibility for their actions and develops their conscience. It teaches children how to calm down when they are angry, provides a cooling off period and a clear, unrewarding consequence for misbehaviour. It gives parents the opportunity to control their anger too. Time Out to Calm Down is not a punishment but a way to create some space for everyone to calm down.

The idea is to make the calm down time brief and then immediately allow the child to try to be successful again. Long Time Outs, beyond 5 minutes, are no more effective. The purpose is not to get revenge or make our children feel bad. Some parents resist the Time Out to Calm Down method because they don't think it results in enough pain or remorse from children. Some children even like Time Out to Calm Down and that's OK. When we impose very strict consequences that "hurt" children, it can result in children who are compliant in their parent's presence out of fear but are likely to behave inappropriately elsewhere. Or children learn to lie or hide problems in order to avoid getting into trouble.

When we finish a calm down time, we need to move on, even if we are still cross or struggling with the child's previous behaviour. Returning to the problem and reminding a child why they went to Time Out is rubbing their nose in the mistake and reviving the image of their misbehaviour. Instead we need to say, "Now let's try again, I know you can do it". It's a clean slate, a fresh start. Later, when everyone has calmed down, we may need to address the issue and do some problem solving so the behaviour is less likely to be repeated.



I am aware that for some parents these ideas may be controversial and may even contradict what you have heard elsewhere. If you want to chat more, please get in touch, or even better, sign up for the next Incredible Years course.

Got any questions? Need any help or advice? E-mail me at parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk