

# EFFECTIVE USE OF TIMEOUT

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## Note:

The following guidelines are presented to help teachers, educators and other practitioners implement timeout procedures appropriately and effectively. These guidelines are not a comprehensive or a complete explanation of how to use timeout in a given setting. Those who are attempting to implement timeout procedures for the first time should have supervision and consultation by professionals with expertise in behavioral intervention procedures, and who have knowledge of the research literature regarding timeout.

Timeout involves removing a student from all sources of positive reinforcement, as a consequence of a specified undesired behavior. Timeout is only one option along a continuum of interventions supporting behavior change. Most teachers think that timeout involves placing the student in an isolated setting (a timeout area) for a period of time. Actually, timeout may be implemented on several alternative levels, ranging from the student taking timeout at his or her desk (contingent observation timeout) to removing the student to a separate area. Timeout is a relatively aversive and intrusive behavior reduction procedure, because it involves the removal of reinforcement and it interrupts the pupil's instructional program. However, its use may be required when the student's behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others. Behavior problems will not be positively affected by use of timeout unless it is used in the context of an appropriate program (e.g., teaching replacement behaviors, high rate of teacher reinforcement for appropriate student behavior, etc.). The age of the student is also a key factor in any decision to utilize time out. Professionals must consider whether timeout is appropriate for children and youth at both ends of the age continuum (3 - 21). Other strategies or interventions may be more effective for these individuals in supporting appropriate behavior

## **Objectives**

You should establish a set of procedures for using timeout in your classroom including:

1. A set of classroom rules and consequences for their infraction.
2. A hierarchy of planned consequences for behavior, with timeout as one of several alternatives for consequenting misbehavior.
3. A range of timeout locations that are suited to your classroom, your pupils, and your personal classroom management plan.
4. A set of personal guidelines for deciding when to use timeout and what level of timeout to employ.

5. Written procedures for applying timeout, including:
  - A warning signal, if appropriate.
  - What you say to pupils when giving them a timeout.
  - Decision rules regarding which level of timeout to impose, and when to go from one level to another.
  - Due process procedures for obtaining administrative and parental consent to use seclusion timeout, if applicable.
  - Specification of the duration of each timeout, how duration is monitored, and decision rules for varying the duration of timeout.
  - Specification of desired student behavior in timeout.
  - Procedures for releasing pupils from timeout.
  - A data sheet for recording instances of timeout.
  - Decision rules for evaluating the effectiveness of timeout with individual students.
6. Alternative interventions when it is concluded that timeout is not effective in a given instance, or in general.
7. Procedures for teaching students to take timeouts appropriately.

**A professional with expertise in behavioral interventions should supervise your application of these procedures across three periodic classroom observations, using the Timeout Evaluation Checklist (see Appendix A).**

***What factors are involved in using timeout?***

1. A **warning signal** indicating that timeout is imminent if the pupil doesn't alter his/her behavior.
2. A brief **verbalized explanation** of why the student is being given a timeout if the student did not alter behavior after warning signal was given.
3. Provide **instruction** (see Appendix B) to the student in taking timeout.
4. The **location** in which timeout is taken
  - **Contingent observation** - requires the student to remain in a position to observe the group without participating or receiving reinforcement for a specified period
  - **Exclusionary** - denies access to reinforcement by removing a student from an ongoing activity
  - **Seclusionary** - removes the student from the instructional setting as a means of denying access to reinforcement
5. The **duration** of timeout

- Brief (e.g., 1-5 minutes) timeouts are as effective as longer timeouts if the student hasn't been exposed to long timeouts first.
- Durations longer than 15 minutes should not be employed.
- A **nonverbal signal** indicating the beginning and end of timeout may be used if students have been taught to respond to it.

#### 6. Requirements for **release from timeout**.

- Completion of the specified duration of timeout.
- Appropriate behavior during timeout.
- End of 15 minute maximum duration of timeout (implement alternate intervention if timeout has not been effective at this point).

#### ***How should timeout be implemented?***

1. Identify reinforcers maintaining the undesired behavior.
2. Conduct a **functional assessment** to identify the function of the target (undesired) behavior.
  - Behavior has two functions: to obtains something the student wants (e.g., teacher or peer attention), or to escape or avoid something he doesn't want (e.g., undesired task)
  - If timeout serves either of these functions, it will not have the desired effect on behavior (e.g., If the student is able to escape an undesired academic activity by going to timeout, behavior resulting in timeout will continue. Timeout also will not be effective if it provides an opportunity to engage in behavior that is self-reinforcing [e.g., self-stimulation]).

**Note:** In addition to a timeout contingency, a plan should be in place to support desired replacement behaviors [see Appendix D for differential reinforcement examples].

3. Specify **in advance** the behaviors which will result in timeout.
4. Use less **intrusive behavior reduction procedures** first (i.e., differential reinforcement [see Appendix D], extinction, verbal aversives, response cost).

5. These less intrusive procedures should have been **documented as ineffective** before timeout is used.
6. Develop a **written statement** of how timeout is to be implemented.
7. If **seclusionary timeout** is used, the following requirements should be met:
  - The timeout room should be at least 6' x 6' or larger and based upon the age and size of the student.
  - The room should be properly lighted and ventilated.
  - The room should be free of objects and fixtures with which the student could harm himself.
  - A staff person should be able to see and hear the student in timeout **at all times**.
    - The area should **never be locked**.
      - Use of a fully enclosed area limits staff observation and access to student.
      - Confinement in a small area may lead to an escalation of student behavior.
      - At no time shall a student be placed in a locked area alone.
8. Keep **written records** (see Appendix C) of each occasion when timeout is used including:
  - Student's name and date
  - Episode resulting in timeout
  - Time of entry into and release from timeout
  - The location of timeout (contingent observation, group separation, exclusion)
  - The student's behavior in timeout
9. Always **differentially reinforce** desired student behavior in time-in environment (classroom or instructional setting). (See Appendix D)
10. **Evaluate procedures** (see Appendix A) if timeout duration exceeds 15 minutes.

11. Evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures if timeout is not having the desired impact on student behavior (collect and chart data on the frequency of the target behavior).

**Note: If timeout does not prove to be an acceptable or effective intervention the Admissions and Release Committee shall determine what interventions are to be utilized to address the behavior(s) of concern. A Functional Behavioral Assessment may be necessary, if not already undertaken, to improve upon or develop a Behavior Intervention Plan.**

### ***How may timeout be abused?***

1. Timeout is overused due to lack of appropriate, proactive, instructional program.
2. The **time-in environment** (Classroom or instructional setting) is not sufficiently reinforcing (see Appendix D).
  - Should give **four times** as much positive reinforcement as reductive consequences.
  - Should have a systematic behavior support plan for teaching and reinforcing a replacement behavior that serves the same function as the undesired behavior.
3. Timeout is **applied inappropriately**.
  - Timeout is the only, or nearly the only, behavior reduction procedure used.
  - Timeout is applied too late---when the student is out of control.
  - Teacher escalates student behavior by lecturing student when in timeout.
4. The **teacher does not enforce timeout contingencies**.
  - Student is able to avoid timeout by arguing or refusing to take timeout.
  - Teacher is unable to direct physically mature students to utilize timeout if they refuse (Consider age appropriateness).
  - Teacher is inconsistent in following through with timeout after warning (i.e., Using timeout after three (3) warnings, five (5) warnings, etc.)
  - Solution is to teach students to take timeout: (see Appendix B).

- Use systematic teaching procedures (e.g., Model, role play/practice and feedback).
- Hold timeout training sessions at other occasions than when timeout is needed: reinforce successive approximations.
- If the teacher is unable or unwilling to enforce timeout, he/she should consider alternate behavior reduction procedures.

#### 5. The effectiveness of **timeout is not evaluated**

- Use the Timeout Record (see Appendix C) to monitor the use and results of timeout. If timeout is used excessively (for example, 3 or more times a day for several consecutive days with a single student) the effectiveness of timeout needs to be evaluated and the individual behavior management plan for that student needs to be adjusted.

### **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

Gast, D. L., and Nelson, C. M. (1977). Legal and ethical considerations for the use of timeout in special education settings. *Journal of Special Education*, 11, 457-467.

Nelson, C. M., and Rutherford, R. B., Jr. (1983). Timeout revisited: Guidelines for its use in special education. *Exceptional Education Quarterly*, 3, 56-67.

Rutherford, R. B., Jr., and Nelson, C. M. (1982). Analysis of the response-contingent timeout literature with behaviorally disordered students in classroom settings. In R. B. Rutherford, Jr. (Ed.). *Severe behavior disorders of children and youth* (Vol. 5). Reston, Virginia: Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.

Twyman, J. S., Johnson, H. Buie, J. D., and Nelson, C. M. (1994). The use of a warning procedure to signal a more intrusive timeout contingency. *Behavioral Disorders*, 19, 243-253.

## Appendix A

### *Time-out Evaluation Checklist*

# TIME OUT EVALUATION CHECKLIST

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**Directions:** Qualified supervisors and consultants may use this form to assess teachers' use of timeout and provide appropriate feedback. Observations should be made on at least three separate occasions (different days) and deficiencies in the application of specific procedures should be corrected with appropriate remedial activities (e.g., modeling, direct instruction, discussion, and referral to informational resources).

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion	EVALUATION (Deficient, Satisfactory, Excellent)	Comments and Remedial Suggestions
1. Classroom rules are appropriate and posted.		
2. Hierarchy of planned consequences is appropriate; location of time out in hierarchy is appropriate.		
3. Time out location (s) is/are appropriate.		
4. Teacher can explain decisions regarding when time out is used, and which level is employed.		
5. Written time out procedures are appropriate (evaluate each separately). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warning signal.</li> <li>• Verbalized explanation to student when giving time out.</li> <li>• Decision rules (i.e., time out levels).</li> <li>• Due process procedures.</li> <li>• Duration of each time out, and how duration is monitored.</li> <li>• Desired student behavior in time out.</li> <li>• Procedures for release from time out.</li> <li>• Time out data sheet.</li> <li>• Decision rules for evaluating time out.</li> </ul>		
6. Alternative interventions have been developed and are appropriate.		
7. Procedures for training pupils to take time out are appropriate and effective.		

	YES	NO
8. Teacher observed administering time out.		
9. If yes, were procedures specified above followed?		
10. If yes, did student take time out appropriately?		
11. If yes, was time out successful in controlling student behavior?		
12. If yes, was time out the most appropriate intervention?		
13. If no, was time out intervention needed, but not used?		
14. If no, was classroom management effective?		
15. If no, was alternative intervention applied effectively?		

**Comments:**

## Appendix B

### *Teaching Students to Take Time-out Appropriately*

# TEACHING STUDENTS TO TAKE A TIME OUT APPROPRIATELY

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**Note:** You should not assume that students will comply with directions to take a timeout if they have not been taught how to do so. This task analysis is a generic lesson for teaching students to take timeouts. Task steps should be altered according to the characteristics and needs of individual students. Steps should be practiced systematically several times a day until each is mastered. You may use individual or small group instruction.

STEP	CRITERION
1. Imitate correct time out behavior (sitting or standing quietly in designated area), for 10 seconds following demonstration by teacher.	5 consecutive correct trials for 3 consecutive days.
2. Demonstrate correct time out behavior for 10 seconds following teacher instruction during practice sessions.	Same as above.
3. Demonstrate correct time out behavior for 30 seconds following teacher instruction during practice sessions.	Same as above.
4. Same as Step 3, but time out duration is 2 minutes.	Same as above.
5. Take a 5-minute time out within 10 seconds, when instructed to do so by a teacher in a real time out situation.	50% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
6. Same as Step 5.	100% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
7. Take a 5-minute time out within 10 seconds, demonstrating appropriate time out behavior, when instructed to do so by general education teacher.  Note: Provide practice steps 1 - 5 if criterion is not met.	50% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
8. Same as Step 7.	100% of assigned time outs correctly taken over 5 consecutive days.

**Comments:**