

Discipline Is Not Punishment

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I find parents often confuse punishment and discipline. If disciplining is done consistently and well, punishment need rarely happen. Discipline and punishment are alike only in that both teach the child something. The problem with punishment as a teaching tool is that the risk is high we as parents are teaching the wrong things. Proper discipline, on the other hand, will teach positive things that will serve the child all during his/her life.

One commonly misunderstood tool of discipline is the "time out." A time out is designed to do one thing: interrupt the inappropriate behavior of a child. It is not punishment, so it must be carefully delivered. But before we get to how to do time out, let's look at the concept of "interruption of inappropriate behavior."

To some degree, once a particular behavior begins, it tends to be self-perpetuating. If a child begins to be loud and boisterous at an inappropriate time, without interruption, he/she will tend to continue that behavior. Time out is a non-punitive way of stopping the self-perpetuating aspect of the behavior.

Usually, time out follows a verbal attempt to stop the child's behavior. Call the child to you and in a calm voice, tell the child to stop whatever it he/she is doing. Assure the child is looking directly at you and you are looking directly at the child when you do this. Don't ask the child to stop. Don't ask the child if he or she is going to stop. Just simply tell him/her to stop.

If that fails to stop the behavior, call the child to you and say something such as this, "I think a time out will help. Go sit [somewhere, such as on the bottom step, on the sofa, the chair] for a few minutes. I'll come get you when the time out is over." This message is delivered in a *calm, patient, matter of fact* voice. "Sermons"

are not helpful and tend to add a punitive air to the time out. If you have a kitchen timer, keep it handy and set the timer for a length of time from 3 minutes to 5 depending on the age of the child. Do not say things such as, "When you think you can behave, you may get up," or, "Do you think you can behave now?" Instead, tell the child, "When the timer rings (or I come get you), you may get up and play."

Avoid sending the child to his/her room or sitting him/her in the corner as the time out location. Again, these smack of punishment. Plus, you want to be able to see the child during the time out to make sure he/she stays put. When the time out is over, the child will tend to find something to entertain him/herself. If you wish, you can suggest something. Remember, our goal was just to interrupt the disruption, not ruin their day.

If the behavior resumes after the time out, repeat the entire procedure in exactly the same way. The only change is to increase the length of time slightly. The theory is the first amount of time didn't provide enough break time. This means, you must moderate your voice tones, keeping your message matter of fact rather than ratcheting it up a notch. It's a myth that raising your voice allows the other person to understand you better! A raised voice is an indication that punishment is underway and that is counter to our goal.

Time out is not sure fire. It is just one of many tools that can be used to help children learn what the rules are and what the family boundaries look like. Remember, our task as parents is to raise our children to be self-confident, independent, productive members of our society. To do that, we have to shape our interactions with them so we model self-confidence, self control and good relational skills.

Ask the Spirit in your daily prayers to give you the patience you need as a parent.