

Using Time In instead of Time Out for Toddler Misbehavior



Time Out for Toddlers are no longer recommended. Here is a step by step guide on how to use Time In when disciplining your child.

Your hair fell off mama. I caught it for you.

That's what I heard one morning as I was waking up.

Before me, stood my 2.5 year old, scissors in one hand, a clump of my hair in the other.

In a mixture of sleepiness and surprise I gently took the scissors away and replaced them with my hand.

Together we shuffled to the nearest mirror.

My toddler was now very quiet, watching me wrinkle my face as I investigated the damage.

The "fallen hair" was about 8 inches in length. Bed hair had a whole new meaning.

I remember taking many, many deep breaths.

This situation called for using time in but before using time in, I needed a moment to start the day.

Responding to a misbehaving toddler is easier if you calm yourself first.

“Frowning. You are frowning mama,” my toddler said. While I wasn’t saying much, I kept thinking, **why, why, why would my toddler do this?!**

“How about we go make breakfast?” I said instead of asking anything about the hair.

My tot had made quite the mistake. But it was already done.

Hungry, sleepy and surprised, I knew it was best to not get into a conversation about the awful situation.

Since my emotions were running high, it wasn’t the right moment to talk about what had happened just yet.

(Don’t worry, this isn’t going to unfold into a suggestion for ignoring toddler misbehaviour.)

Toddlers absolutely need clear limits, boundaries and discipline.

Stick through to the end for a step by step tutorial on doing exactly this in a way that actually helps your toddler learn to do better.)

Understanding toddler misbehavior and developmental milestones



Many parents and caregivers have very **high expectations when it comes to toddler behavior**. In fact, a national survey from [Zero To Three](#) revealed that most parents think toddlers should be capable of self-control much sooner than actually developmentally possible.

Some parents believe that self-regulation is already possible at age 2 and shouldn't be a challenge anymore at age 3. This just isn't the case and can breed a lot of frustration and resentment too.

Toddlers are growing and learning each day by leaps and bounds.

Toddlers often misbehave because they are still so very immature, impulsive and curious.

The human brain begins to develop abilities of emotional self-regulation and impulse control sometime around age 3 and half years.

It's all a process of learning and can lead to a lot of mistakes, and perceived misbehaviour. Your toddler is in fact often simply unable to stop themselves from acting on their desires.

Grabbing, taking, refusing to share, throwing, biting, cutting mom's hair...All examples of self-regulation under construction.

Parenting choices can support the proper development of self-regulation

With guidance, your toddler can and will learn how to safely explore, tend to their curiosity and impulses and meet your expectations.

Knowing that your child is still learning to regulate emotions and responses can help you better respond to your child as well.

When you take the time to slow down and teach your child what they can do, you are directly helping them develop self-regulation skills.

For your child's future, academic and social well-being these skills matter quite a bit.



Having a better understanding of toddler behaviour can reduce your own frustrations and prevent many mistakes and mischief.

Toddlers and young children learn self-regulation and how to make better choices best through interactions with you and other caregivers. If you can model what it means to stay calm and solve problems, your child will likely learn to do the same. Instead of blurting “MINE!” and grabbing a toy, your toddler can learn to ask for “my turn?” for example.

Help your toddler learn self-regulation skills by substituting Time Out for Time In.

This tool is about intentionally making time to allow your toddler to flex budding empathy skills and reflect on their own choices. Time in can also be a chance for your toddler to release pent up stress and emotions before they are ready to listen to your guidance.

The pace of time in can be set by you and doesn't follow a timer or rigid structure.

The most important difference between a time in and a traditional time out is that this tool is meant to help you and your child bond first before you offer corrections.

Here is a Quick Guide for Using Time In instead of Time Out

Let's get back to that morning of the hair incident.

After breakfast, feeling calmer and having carefully chosen my words it was time for time in.

1. Time In Starts with Connection

This is your first step to build safety and trust, it might feel as if you are doing nothing about the actual misbehavior but in fact this is a very important step if you want to create a path towards learning and better behavior. Toddlers need to feel safe and secure before they are ready to learn:

My toddler and I had a relaxed and sweet little chat:

"How were the peaches?" I asked.

"Tasty!"

"I thought they were so sweet today. And the bananas?" I continued.

"Sticky. Sticky! Kiss you with sticky banana kisses?" my toddler offered.

"Uhhh, sticky kisses! I like sticky kisses!" I said with a smile.

"I have kisses from you too!!" my toddler went on happily.

Laughter.



2. Time In offers simple and non punitive corrections

“So...I’m surprised and upset about my hair,” I said with a gentle smile but concerned eyes.

“It was in your face when you were sleeping. Oh mama, I did scissors NOT on paper.”

This was a great clue that my toddler was well aware of our family rules for the scissors. If it didn’t seem like my toddler remembered this rule, I would have explained it again in clear and simple terms.

During this part of Time In say what you want your toddler to learn in simple, short phrases. Focus on what you wish to see next time around instead of spending too much time talking about everything that wasn’t working.

3. Time In allows for learning, making amends and making a plan for doing better

My toddler cried in my arms. The mistake was being processed.

The worry was being let go. And the information about scissors and hair not being a good idea was sinking in.

“Sorry. I sorry to you.” My toddler said as tears subsided.

“I can see you are sorry...You know you can use scissors on paper – or ribbon. I can give you some later too.”

My tot nodded in understanding.

Discipline should set your toddler up for success and show them you trust them to do better next time.



Later that day, my tot had great fun cutting ribbons and paper. And gently, I reminded my tot one more time that it was not alright to use scissors to cut my hair – or anyone else’s hair either.

This example of Time In shows one way of talking to a child about a behaviour that has already happened and needs to be addressed. Time in is a very flexible tool, so you can adjust the steps to help you and your toddler get through other challenges as well.

Toddlers will cross many, many boundaries and expectations as they grow and learn.

- Strive to remember the importance, and positive impact that your respectful loving guidance has on our child’s well-being.
- Focus on building encouraging, loving, and understanding relationships
- Actively create an environment in which your toddler will feel safe to make mistakes, accept your guidance and ultimately learn.
- Remember that having to repeat yourself in the toddler years is quite normal
- Try time in to help you slow down and address behaviors in a deliberate and respectful manner.

If your toddler has been frequently breaking rules and getting into mischief, it may be worthwhile to reflect on how you are setting boundaries and to be proactive about creating a safe, toddler proof home. Time in is a great tool, and the more positive parenting tools you have, the more you and your toddler can enjoy each other.

Interested in learning how to set kind and clear limits, and discover helpful tools parents and toddlers absolutely love?

Join our Positive Parenting First Five Years course and discover more amazing tools like Special time, Can Do Plan and Emotion Coaching scripts, all which support healthy development of self-regulation and cooperative skills.