

## Rules, Rewards, Reprimands, and Time Out

A Parents' Toolkit for dealing with disruptive, difficult and dangerous behaviour

(Based on Every Parent – A positive approach to children's behaviour, by Matt Sanders, PhD.)

Parents need a set of tools/procedures that they can confidently use to deal with their child's disruptive behaviour, and that they can adapt progressively to meet any escalation in the seriousness of the behaviour. The tools of Rules, Rewards, Reprimands, and Time Out provide one example of a set of such procedures. Just as we don't have just one tool (like a hammer) in our ordinary toolkit, we don't have just one procedure (like time out) in our parenting toolkit.

Rules: Rules say what "good" and "bad" behaviours are for any particular family and circumstance. They should be:

- Few
- Fair
- Clear/Simple to understand (to the child and the parent)
- Where possible, positively stated (i.e., "Do X", rather than "Don't do X").

Don't make Rules if you are not willing to consistently enforce them.

Rewards: When a child follows a Rule, give them a Reward. The simplest Reward to give a child is Descriptive Praise. "I really liked it when you .... [followed the Rule]."

Reprimands/Warnings: Use Reprimands as the first step when a Rule is broken.

- Get the child's attention – use their name; make sure they are looking at you.
- State the Rule – and if you wish, remind the child for the reason for the Rule.
- Deliver the Reprimand as a statement about the Rule being broken. Do this in a matter of fact way.
- Deliver the Warning. "If you [break the Rule again (in some immediate time period)] XXX will be the consequence".

BE CONSISTENT – don't make empty threats.

Time out: Time out is a follow-up when a Reprimand/Warning is not heeded. The point of time out is to impose a period of boredom and no rewards, not discomfort, pain, or distress. Time out can vary in how it is done and in how long each time out is for. Some forms of time out involve removal from an activity to the periphery of the activity – e.g., "quiet time", the time out stool, or

“naughty mat”. Other forms of time out may involve being removed to more socially isolating conditions, e.g., to a time out room. For safety and effectiveness, children must be monitored while in time out. The door of the time out room should not to be locked. However, while the child is in time out, conversation, complaints, and moderate misbehaviour is ignored. Time out should be reasonably short. One rule of thumb is time out minutes = child’s age in years + 1. If severe misbehaviour occurs during time out, time out length can be added to, one minute at a time. If a child leaves or escapes time out before the time is up, they are to be returned to time out and the clock restarted.

After time out, regard the incident as closed. Do not keep discussing the Rule, or repeating the Reprimand, or engaging in other parental wingeing. Monitor the child, and as soon as possible, find an opportunity to reward your child for being good and reward her/him with descriptive praise. If the time out has interrupted a task that must be completed, e.g., getting ready for bed, then return the child to the task, give the instruction again, and praise compliance. Use time out if further resistance or non-compliance occurs.

When you successfully manage your child’s misbehaviour give yourself a positive “pat on the back”. When your partner does the same, give him or her some supportive praise.