

Timeout in Public

Timeout is a **learned skill**, not a place. Children are not born knowing how to do timeout, so parents must teach it through consistent structure and repeated practice.

Consistency comes from “doing timeout” the same way every time.

- Children go to timeout every time they do not follow instructions (per the compliance sequence) or break a house rule.
- Timeout is not complete until the child is quiet and still and is released by the parent.
- For noncompliance, the interaction is not finished until the child follows the original instruction; failure to comply immediately (no warning) results in a return to timeout.

Structure comes from the timeout location in the home.

- Choose a timeout location that is distraction-free, allows the parent to monitor the child, and does not provide entertainment (no TV, toys, or watching others); a plain wall or corner works well.
- An adult-sized chair is recommended to clearly identify when a child is out of timeout, defined as both feet on the floor.

Once a child can complete timeout at home (goes when told and sits quiet and still until released), parents may teach mini timeouts for public settings. Mini timeouts are practiced ahead of time by explaining that the child is not in trouble and is only practicing. The child is instructed to sit crisscross on the floor and count to 10, then stand up when told.

In public, if the child breaks a rule or does not follow an instruction, the parent designates a clear spot (e.g., a tile, bench, or area) and states, “Timeout for [behavior].” For early practice, the parent directs the child to sit crisscross and count to 10. After the count, the parent addresses the original issue: reissue the instruction for noncompliance (praise compliance; return to timeout if the child does not comply, no warning) or remind the child of the rule and praise rule-following.

Timeout occurs when the parent clearly establishes the timeout experience, wherever they are.

Public Timeout Steps

- Practice mini timeouts at home
 - Tell the child he/she is not in trouble and he/she is just practicing
 - Tell the child to sit on a specific spot on the floor crisscross applesauce and to count to 10
 - When the child counts to 10 tell him/her to get up
- In public when the child’s behavior warrants timeout (noncompliance or rule violation) tell the child he/she has to do a mini timeout for the specific behavior
- Tell the child to sit on a specific spot, crisscross applesauce and to count to 10
- When the child finishes counting to 10 tell him/her to get
- Address the original behavior
 - For noncompliance reissue the command
 - Praise compliance or implement timeout again
 - For a rule violation remind the child of the rule and praise adherence to the rule