REFRIGERATOR NOTES
WHEN YOU HAVE TO TELL YOUR CHILD “NO”

• Clearly set the limit calmly and briefly
• Ignore protests or tantrums which result because of the limit set
• When child is calm again, redirect or distract him with something else interesting
• Remove the object (e.g., food item or toy) that is not allowed so it is not tempting (disconnect computer)
• Tell your child yes when you can
• Give a direction that tells your child what he CAN do as an alternative to what he can’t do
• Offer limited choices when possible
• Respond with humor or a song
• Turn tasks into games, for example, “fly” to the bathroom, or make a “train” to the bedroom.
• Don’t give a lot of attention to your child’s protests or “no” –ignore, redirect, or change the subject so it is not reinforced with attention
• Monitor how many “nos” you give and see if they are necessary.
Handout

LEARNING SELF-CONTROL

Many family members find that in stressful situations they cannot maintain their self-control. Others report they suffer from chronic anger, anxiety or depression, and they are easily set off by the slightest event. However, when parents allow themselves to become so overwhelmed that they overreact, the consequences can be unfortunate. Parents may say or do something they will regret. After they calm down, they may feel guilty and avoid dealing with the child for fear of repeating the episode. It is frightening and anxiety-provoking for a child to see a parent lose control. Also, the child learns to imitate these aggressive behaviors in other situations. These cycles of parental overreaction and avoidance make it difficult to deal with the child in a consistent manner. The best approach is to achieve a middle ground—not be so overwhelmed that you can’t respond or so upset that you overreact.

Upsetting Thoughts

“That child is a monster. This is getting ridiculous. He’ll never change.”

“I’m sick of being his maid. Things are going to change or else!”

“He’s just like his father.”

I can’t handle it when he’s angry.”

Calming Thoughts

“This child is testing to see if he can have his own way. My job is to stay calm and help him learn better ways to behave.”

“I need to talk to Michael about his clothes lying around. If we discuss this calmly, we should reach a good solution.”

“I can handle this. I am in control. He has just learned some powerful ways to get control. I will teach him more appropriate ways to behave.”

THOUGHT CONTROL

Researchers have demonstrated that there is a relationship between how we think and how we behave. For example, if you view the child in hostile terms (“He is misbehaving because he hates me—he likes to get me upset”), you are likely to become very angry. On the other hand, if your thoughts emphasize your ability to cope (“I’m going to have to help him learn to control himself”), this will help to bring about rational and effective responses. One of the first steps for improving the way you think about your child is to replace upsetting thoughts and negative self-statements with calming thoughts.
Handout

Putting It All Together

1. Identify and label your emotions when they first occur. Pay attention to how your body feels (for example, tenseness, fidgeting, anger, headaches).

2. Decide what events make you feel frustrated.

3. Choose the most effective way to control yourself, and do it.

Non-Constructive Thoughts

“John never helps. All I get is work, work, work. I fix the food, take care of the house, the kids, everything. Boy, would I like to throw this at him!”

“After working 10 hours, I’m tired and frustrated. When I get home, all I get are hassles. The kids interrupt and yell, and Joan criticizes me. This place is a mess. What does she do all day? I feel like screaming or walking out of here.”

Constructive Thoughts

“I’d better watch it and calm down before I do something I’ll regret. What I need is help. Maybe if I ask John in a nice way, he’ll give me some help. That’s the best way. Then maybe I can have a relaxing bath.”

“Take it easy now. Take a few breaths. What I really need is a few minutes of peace to relax and read the paper. Maybe if I ask Joan nicely to play with the kids while I read, then I could give her a break and play with the kids later. She needs a rest too. That’s the most helpful way. I can already feel myself relaxing.”

“I can handle this. I can stay in control. “She’s just testing the limits. My job is to stay calm and help her learn better ways.”
REFRIGERATOR NOTES
ABOUT IGNORING

• Avoid eye contact and discussion while ignoring.
• Physically move away from your child but stay in the room if possible.
• Be subtle in the way you ignore.
• Be prepared for testing.
• Be consistent and patient.
• Return your attention as soon as misbehavior stops.
• Combine distractions and redirections with ignoring.
• Choose specific child behaviors to ignore and make sure they are ones you can ignore.
• Limit the number of behaviors to systematically ignore.
• Give attention to your child’s positive behaviors.
• Try to regulate your own mood and stay calm when ignoring.
REFRIGERATOR NOTES
EVIDENCE-BASED TIME OUT
FOR AGGRESSIVE AND HIGHLY OPPOSITIONAL BEHAVIOR

• Teach children how to go to Time Out to calm down and practice this when children are not misbehaving.
• Be prepared for testing.
• Monitor and control personal anger and stay respectful.
• Give 3-5-minute Time Outs with 2-minute calm at the end.
• Carefully select the type of behaviors for which Time Out will be used consistently and sparingly.
• Don’t threaten Time Outs unless you’re prepared to follow through.
• Ignore child’s protests but monitor their safety while in Time Out.
• Use Time Out for aggressive behavior regardless of setting.
• Support a partner’s use of Time Out.
• Don’t rely exclusively on Time Out—combine with other discipline techniques, such as ignoring, distract and redirection, logical consequences and problem solving.
• Expect repeated learning trials.
• Plan backup loss of privileges for older children who refuse to go to Time Out.
• Build up your child’s bank account with child-directed play, coaching, praise, love and support.
• Model using personal Time Out to relax, calm down and refuel energy.
REFRIGERATOR NOTES
ABOUT STRESS AND ANGER

• Scan your body for tension, and breathe and relax or do the exercises.
• Notice any negative self-statements and replace them with soothing self-encouragement.
• Ask yourself if what is making you feel tense is really that important? Will it make a difference a week from now? A year? When you are 70?
• Visualize some marvelous past event or dream of the future.
• In the middle of conflict, breathe, cool off, get playful, or get away for a few minutes.
• Take a break (go for a walk, take a bath, read a magazine).

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**Responding to Child Dysregulation and Teaching Self-Regulation**

*Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Ph.D.*

**My child is upset, angry, defiant & beginning to dysregulate**

**Parent Self-Talk**

“My child is upset because… and needs help to self-regulate and problem solve.”

“I can stay calm. This will help my child to stay calm.”

“I can ignore this behavior as long as he is not hurting someone or breaking something.”

“I can be supportive without giving too much attention to disruptive behavior.”

“If my child is responsive and cooperative to my coaching, then it’s a good time to coach. If my coaching makes her angrier, then she needs space and privacy to calm down.”

**Parent Response**

- Model deep breathing, patience and being sympathetic to child
- Help child use calm down thermometer and take deep breaths
- Redirect child to another activity
- Ignore child’s dysregulated behavior as long as behavior is not unsafe
- Label child’s emotion and coping strategy: “You look angry, but you are trying hard to stay calm with breathing and remembering your happy place.”
- Stay nearby and be supportive.
- Give attention and coaching to behaviors that encourage your child’s coping and emotion regulation.
When children are angry and dysregulated, parents may also feel angry and out-of-control and may respond by yelling, criticizing, or spanking. At these times, Time Out can provide time and space for the parent, as well as the child, to self-regulate. Here are some tips for parent self-regulation:

• STOP and challenge negative thoughts and use positive self-talk such as: “All children misbehave at times. My child is testing the limits of his independence to learn that our household rules are predictable and safe. This is normal for children this age and not the end of the world.”

• Do some deep breathing and repeat a calming word: “relax,” “be patient,” “take it easy.”

• Think of relaxing imagery or of fun times you have had with your child.

• Take a brief break by washing your face, having a cup of tea, putting on some music, or patting the dog. Make sure your child is safe and monitored.

• Focus on coping thoughts such as: “I can help my child best by staying in control.”

• Forgive yourself and be sure you are building in some “personal time” for relaxation.

• Ask for support from someone else.

• Reconnect with your child as soon as you are both calm.

Like your child you can get yourself into a “green” calm state and try again.
My child continues to dysregulate and becomes aggressive

Parent Self-Talk

“My child is out of control and too dysregulated to benefit from prompts to calm down or to discuss solutions to problems.”

“I need to give my child time away from attention to calm down so he doesn’t hurt someone.”

“I have taught my child how to use the Time Out or Tiny Turtle chair to calm down so I can do that now.”

“Time Out is a safe and respectful way for my child to learn to reflect and self-regulate.”

Parent Response

• I say, “Hitting is not allowed, you need to go to Time Out to calm down.” (This place has a calm down thermometer to remind my child of what to do in Time Out to calm down.)

• I wait patiently nearby to let him re-regulate and make sure others don’t give this disruptive behavior attention.

• I give him privacy and don’t talk to him during this calm down time.

• When he is calm (3-5 minutes), I praise him for calming down.

• I support my child to re-enter an activity or routine.
My Child Is Calm Now

Parent Self-Talk

“Now I can reconnect with my child and help her learn an alternative way to solve her problem.”

“She is learning she gets more attention for positive behavior than inappropriate behavior.”

“I can help her learn to express her frustration and anger in more appropriate ways.”

Parent Response

- I praise my child for calming down
- I distract my child to a new learning opportunity.
- I do not force my child to apologize because insincere apologies do not teach empathy
- I engage her in something else so that we have positive Time In together and she feels loved.
- I start using social coaching as my child plays
- I also look for times when she is calm, patient, happy, or friendly.
- I use emotion coaching to help her understand these self-regulated feelings get my attention.
- If she starts to dysregulate again, I name her uncomfortable feelings, help her express these verbally, and prompt her to remember her coping strategies.
- During times when my child is calm, I use puppets, games, and stories to help her learn alternative solutions to common childhood problem situations.

Bottom Line

My child learns that taking a Time Out feels like a safe and secure place to calm down; it is not punitive or harsh and isolating; my child understands that when he has calmed down, he can join in family or peer activities without blame and has a new opportunity to try again with another solution to his problem. He feels loved when this strategy has been used and has sometimes seen his parents or teachers use this same strategy when they are angry. My child gets far more Time In attention from me for positive behaviors than negative behaviors. He feels loved and secure when using Time Out because it gives him time to re-regulate and try again in a loving environment. Time Out provides me with a chance to take a deep breath and calm down so I can respond to my child in a calm, firm, consistent, nurturing or caring manner.
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE LOSING CONTROL

1. Step back from the situation for a moment and ask yourself:
   - What is my goal?
   - What am I doing now?
   - Is what I am doing helping me to reach my goal?
   - What do I need to do differently?

2. Practice the relaxation technique:
   - Slow down your breathing.
   - Count from one to ten as far as you are able to in a single breath.
   - Repeat deep, slow inhaling and exhaling while counting until you feel relaxed.

3. Recognize your upsetting thoughts. Rephrase these thoughts into alternative, calming thoughts. For example:

   **Upsetting Thoughts**
   
   “That child is a monster. That is ridiculous. He’ll never change.”

   “I’m sick of being this mad. Things are going to change around here, or else.”

   **Calming Thoughts**
   
   “This is a child who is testing to see if he can get his own way. My job is to stay calm and help him learn better ways to behave.”

   “I need to talk to Michael about leaving his clothes lying around. If we discuss this constructively and calmly we should be able to reach a good solution.”
REFRIGERATOR NOTES
ABOUT NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

- Make consequences developmentally appropriate.
- Be sure you can live with consequences you set up.
- Make consequences immediate.
- Clearly state consequences ahead of time.
- Make consequence natural and non-punitive.
- Involve child whenever possible.
- When possible, give a warning before giving consequence. “if... then”.
- Be friendly and positive.
- Use consequences that are immediate, short, and to the point.
- Establish a list of possible loss of privileges and disciplinary chores.
- Once consequence is completed, quickly offer the child new learning opportunity to be successful.
REFRIGERATOR NOTES
POSITIVE DISCIPLINE HELPS MY CHILD FEEL LOVED AND SECURE

- Play frequently and provide social and emotional coaching
- Label and reflect your child’s feelings—even negative feelings
- Structure your child’s day with a predictable routine for mornings, naps, meals, and bedtime
- Set clear limits when needed to keep your child safe
- Help your child prepare for transitions or changes in routine
- Have a predictable routine for leaving your child and reuniting
- Give your child choices when possible
- Share your love and praise and tell your child how special he is
- Give your child attention and praise for positive behavior
- Redirect your child’s negative behavior
- Allow your child independence when possible
- Help your child explore while giving appropriate support
- Ignore tantrums and give back attention as soon as tantrum stops
- Take care of yourself by getting support from others and doing things for yourself