

# Siegel and Bryson: Are You Hurting Parents and Children?

BY SUSAN WILCZYNSKI

*Note: The following letter was signed by the Practice Board for the Association for Behavior Analysis International in response to a recent post on the Time Magazine blog (Ideas Parenting) entitled, "Time-Outs Are Hurting Your Child" (published September 23, 2014; <http://time.com/3404701/discipline-time-out-is-not-good/>).*

In their recent article, "Time-Outs Are Hurting Your Child," Siegel and Bryson risk hurting parent-child relationships by offering unsupported opinions and ignoring the multiple studies that show time-out is an effective parenting strategy. We agree that when parents reject their child it can create immediate and long-term problems, but the authors' leap of equating time-out with rejection of the child is unfounded and dangerous. Children thrive on predictability; knowing a parent consistently provides love and attention when a child is being kind to others and safe is an important part of the predictability equation. Parenting experts call these positive, shared experiences "time-in." In fact, time-out does not work unless parents use time-in. However, the other half of the predictability equation is that children learn there are consistent consequences for serious rule violations. Time-out is an effective consequence and children make sense of their world when time-in and time-out are predictably combined. In life, there are consequences for people's significant misbehavior. Older children get kicked out of school; adolescents and adults may lose their jobs or, worse still, end up in prison. The way children can avoid these devastating and life-altering consequences is to learn how to regulate their own response to difficult situations. Time-out gives them the chance to practice self-calming techniques in a safe environment—with their loving parents.

Siegel and Bryson suggest parents set "clear limits" while talking about the problem behavior. If parents' immediate response to children's aggression, self-injury, or tantrums is to hug them and talk about what happened, the problem is likely to get worse instead of better. What children will learn is that the best way to get mom and dad's attention is to misbehave. Talking about the rules and consequences is important, but parents who have these discussions when their child is calm and ready to listen will teach their children more about limits and still maintain a positive relationship.

All parents want their children to be happy, respectful of themselves and others, and fully and positively engaged with the world. Trying to achieve this makes parenting the most difficult job on the planet. Parents do not take sick or vacation time when their child misbehaves; they deal with their children's behavior (and misbehavior) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Parenting can be so stressful that even the best parents may turn to physical punishment when they are exhausted and overwhelmed with a child that is biting them, hitting a sibling, or screaming for hours at a time. It is dangerous to tell parents not to use an effective parenting technique like time-out, particularly when offering no other realistic alternative leaves a vacuum in which parents are likely to respond with physical punishment.

Within the context of the above information, it seems appropriate to suggest how readers might learn to implement "time-in" and "time-out." Alan Kazdin, past president of the American Psychological Association and director of the Yale Parenting Center and Child Conduct Clinic, has provided such a resource. In his book titled, *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, Dr. Kazdin provides much information regarding parenting strategies. One particular strategy discussed, is the use of "time-in" and "time-out." He summarizes the above points with this statement, "The point of using the term 'time-out from reinforcement' is to keep you focus on punishment as a (minor) element of a positive reinforcement program and to help you move away from thinking of a time-out as giving the child a chance to contemplate his crimes ..." (p. 141). Furthermore, he states, "I'll say it one more time: research shows that the effectiveness of time-out depends on the effectiveness of time-in ..."

In contrast to Siegel and Bryson, the members of the Practice Board for the Association of Behavior Analysis International state time-out can be an effective parenting strategy if understood and implemented correctly. Resources, such as the one listed above, can assist parents and grandparents in learning about and implementing time-out effectively.

## References

Daniel J. Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson (2014, September 23). "Time-Outs Are Hurting Your Child [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3404701/discipline-time-out-is-not-good/#3404701/discipline-time-out-is-not-good/>

Kazdin, A. E. (2009). *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*. New York, NY: Mariner Books.

## **ABAI Practice Board Members**

*Susan Wilczynski (author)*

*Jennifer Zarcone (chair)*

*Ed Daly*

*Ronnie Detrich*

*Thomas Higbee*

*Meeta Patel*

*Shawn Quigley*

*Robert Ross*