

How time-outs hinder advanced brain development in children

by Suzanne Tucker, Founder of [Generation Mindful](#), Reprinted with permission

As an alternative to more barbaric corporal punishment, the concept of "time-outs" were established in 1958 by Arthur Staats, based on the theory of psychological behaviorism whereby the parent or caretaker takes something away from the child to modify their behavior. This can be a restriction of play time, freedom, communication and connection or anything the child holds valuable; you are placing it in a time out or holding pattern to modify the child's behavior with the promise that it will then be returned. While a child's behavior might conform temporarily to gain back access to whatever was taken away during a time out, this practice that was so wholly embraced in pop culture parenting actually hinders a child's ability to understand and regulate his or her own emotions and stymies the development of emotional intelligence – the largest predictor of future happiness and success.

Time Outs vs Time Ins

Some time-out actions have been shown to result in similar brain activity to the brain activity that results from infliction of physical pain, because the child feels isolated during punishment or time outs.

The appropriate use of time outs looks like brief, infrequent, previously explained breaks from an interaction, used as a part of a conscious parenting strategy that is followed by positive feedback, and connection with the parent. Unfortunately, time outs often happen in moments of a parent's intense anger which uses parental verbal and emotional hostility and repeated humiliation and isolation for the child. Time outs were initially designed to help children calm down so they can reflect on or change their behavior through the healthy development of their own emotional

self-regulating system (an ability that comes from emotional intelligence quotient or EQ).

Stopping the cycle of inappropriate time outs and instead using time-ins

Research shows that by the time a child is three years old, their brain is already 80% of its adult size. It is hard to ask a child to sit still, be quiet, and listen if they have not been taught the skills required to carry out these requests. Expecting children to perform these tasks is like expecting a newborn baby to know how to tie his/her own shoes. The brain hasn't developed this capability yet. Emotional self-regulation and emotional intelligence is taught, just like the ABCs and 123s are taught.

The good news is that through modeling these positive behaviors, children can be taught the fundamental components of social and emotional skills before they are asked to apply them. Things like self-awareness, impulse control, emotional regulation, and more. All of these skills can be taught in age-appropriate, play-based and child-led ways, long before children are placed in a school or group learning environment where these skills will be expected of them.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), there are 5 key skills to social-emotional learning:

- 1. Self-awareness:** This is your child's ability to notice feeling sensations within their body and naming them. *I feel mad because he took my toy or I feel happy when I work hard.*
- 2. Self-management:** When we teach our children how to manage the sensations in their bod-

ies, they learn the skills of self-regulation. Eventually, this co-regulation leads to self-regulation of emotions and behaviors and develops skills such as problem-solving and impulse control. *When I felt mad, I took three deep breaths or When I felt determined, I focused on my project.*

3. Social awareness: This is when your child moves from “me” to “we” and understands, empathizes, and feels compassion for others. *My friend looked sad, so I gave her a hug.*

4. Relationship skills: Making friends is a skill that involves many higher-level functions such as conflict resolution, open communication, and seeing others’ viewpoints. *We want something different. How can we both win?*

5. Responsible decision making: This is when your child explores and understands his/her values and beliefs and uses their ethical compass when making decisions. *If I choose not to study, what are some likely outcomes?*

Tips for developing social emotional learning in your home

1. Use everyday experiences: Families can organically grow social-emotional skills by using everyday life experiences - trips to the grocery store, playing a board game, responding to their sibling who took their toy, and so forth. Every instance is a real-world learning opportunity to plan, problem-solve, and reflect as children grow their social-emotional skills. This empowers families to use life’s moments, both pleasant and unpleasant, as ways to help their child learn and grow.

2. Offer Time-Ins: [Time-Ins](#) are a useful tool in managing daily experiences and to playfully teach kids about their feelings. When a child is feeling big emotions, use the space to help them notice the sensations in their body, name them, and select strategies for calming. Once children self-reflect and regulate, they are better able to work on the other facets of SEL. Here are some tips about time-ins:

Create a safe space to feel with your child.

Introduce the space during non-elevated moments to intrinsically motivate your child to go there when regulated and create safety to return when dysregulated.

Playfully introduce emotions and calming strategies through games and age-appropriate books.

Go there with your child. Before a child can self-regulate, they must learn the skills through co-regulation. With your child, help them revisit what happened, how they felt, and if another person was involved, how that other person may have felt about what happened, too. Encourage problem-solving and prompt make-ups and re-dos.

Go there yourself. Model using the space during your big feelings, too. Your child will learn just by watching you identify your own emotions and selecting a calming strategy.

Why the Generation Mindful movement?

One of the goals of Generation Mindful is to achieve a feeling of more love and nurturing for the child, to help kids cooperate in the moment; and to build lifelong skills like self-discipline, responsibility, empathy, and positive behaviors. As parents we need to pay attention to their emotions and to the feelings behind their behaviors. Our suggestion is simple. Connect and Redirect. Teach your child to Name It, Feel It, Heal It. All of these tools are found in Generation Mindful's popular [Time In Toolkit](#).

Suzanne Tucker is a 27 year parent educator and founder of Generation Mindful, an e-commerce company and social-educational movement that is connecting the generations playfully, through the use of tangible, evidence-based tools and toys to help parents and educators apply the science of positive discipline into their everyday lives, particularly when they are feeling stressed or their children are acting out.

Generation Mindful offers free positive parenting courses, worldwide, and their products currently ship to 200 countries. Their rapidly growing movement includes 1.2 Million followers on social media. See their handles below:

<https://www.facebook.com/PositiveParentingToddlersandBeyond>

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