



Outrageous claims regarding the appropriateness of Time Out have no basis in science

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We are writing to express strong concern with the article “Time-Outs’ Are Hurting Your Child” by Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (9/23/14) which described time-out as “ineffective” and seemingly equated this practice with “physical abuse”. Based on their selective review of recent neuroscientific findings, these authors advocate rejecting the use of time-out in favor of an alternative strategy, “time-in” which they describe a “forging a loving relationship” through sitting or talking with or comforting the child immediately following the child’s misbehavior.

Unfortunately, none of the authors’ conclusions regarding the rejection of time-out or the use of “time-in” are directly supported by research evidence, nor do they reflect a clear understanding of correctly implemented time-out. Decades of carefully controlled studies support the efficacy of time-out when used correctly with regard to the child’s developmental and emotional status and in the context of a broader behavioral management program. Time out appropriately used involves explaining to the child during a non-crisis time how and why the procedure is being used. At the end of the Time Out the child should be praised and rewarded for following the procedure, a parent hug works well at this point—akin to what Siegel and Payne Bryson refer to as Time In. While it is possible that “time-in” by itself may be a useful tool for some children in some circumstances, no evidence is available to support this. Thus, broad recommendation of “time in” only is premature, and potentially harmful, in the absence of controlled and replicated research documenting efficacy and safety. It is a disservice to the public to suggest that families try an unproven approach when one with decades of support is available. This isn’t to say that time-out is appropriate for every child or in every circumstance, but it is the place to start. For information on the scientific foundation of Time Out individuals may access a reference list at effectivechildtherapy.com.

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