Time-out Dos and Don’ts

- Do make ‘time-in’ as rich as possible, include lots of affection, descriptive praise, engaging activities and parental attention. This is a vital part of the time-out strategy. Descriptive praise should be enthusiastic and focus on the behaviours you would like the child to do more of (e.g., staying calm, being gentle, keeping hands and feet to self, doing as asked straight away).

- Do use time-out for inappropriate behaviours that the child has some control over, such as aggression, biting, kicking or screaming.

- Do stay calm when using time-out.

- Do return the child to time-in as soon as possible after time-out is over.

- Do ask the child to sit quietly in time-out for a short time while they calm down and regulate their emotions. Time-out ends after they have been quiet for the set period of time in time-out.

- Do keep time-out to a short period of time. Requiring the child to be quiet for two minutes in time-out is usually enough.

- Do use time-out on a chair or a step in the same room or nearby. Return the child to time-out if they leave before their period of quiet is over.

- Do not give any attention to the child whilst they are in time-out and ensure that there is nothing for them to play with.

- Do keep a diary to record how often you use time-out. Your need to use time-out should decrease over time.

- Do seek further assistance if you find time-out is not effective or if you have questions. Consult a child and family practitioner or enroll in the free online parenting program ParentWorks: www.parentworks.org.au

- Do tell the child the reason why they are going to time-out (e.g., you hit your brother, you have not done as I have asked) and remind the child of the rules of time-out (sit and be quiet for two minutes) every time you use it.

- Do have a playful rehearsal of time-out before you start using it. Roleplay by putting a toy or another caregiver in time-out so the child knows what to expect. Let the child know what behaviours will earn time-out.
- Do repeat the instruction to the child after time-out is over, if they went to time-out for noncompliance. Further noncompliance will earn an additional time-out.
- Do not allow the child to decide when they are ready to exit time-out; time-out works best when controlled by the parent.
- Do not use time-out for behaviours that represent an inability to do something, such as making a mistake or a fear of doing something, or a lack of understanding.
- Do not criticise the child or use rejecting language that threatens the child’s attachment.

**SOURCE:** Professor Mark Dadds, Child Behaviour Research Clinic, University of Sydney