

Repairing Relationships with a Time-In

(This is a guideline. It is, of course, harder than this page makes it sound.)

I'm Upset and My Child is Upset

When necessary, I start with a "Time-Out"* (for me, for my child, or for both of us) until:

- I know that I am bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind, and
- I remind myself that no matter how I feel, my child needs me.

* A "Time-Out" can be helpful as a first step, but not as a punishment.

I'm Calm (enough) and My Child is Upset

We can build a safe "repair routine" together (remember: the first 1,000 times are the hardest!).

- I take charge so my child is not too out of control.
- We can change location. Go to a neutral place that is our "Time-in" spot, where we sit together and let feelings begin to change.
- I maintain a calm tone of voice (firm, reassuring, and kind).
- We can do something different (for several minutes): read, or look out the window, or attend to a chore together.
- I help my child bring words to her/his feelings. ("It looks like this is hard for you." "Are you mad/sad/afraid?")
- I talk about my feelings about what just happened. ("When you did that, I felt...")
- I stay with my child until s/he is calm *enough*. (It may take a while for a child to calm down from overwhelming and unorganized feelings. Rule of thumb: Stay in charge and stay sympathetic.)

I'm Calm (enough) and My Child is Calm (enough)

I use the following to support our repair and to make repair easier in the future.

- I help my child use words for the needs and feelings that s/he is struggling with by listening and talking together. (Remember KISS—Keep It Short And Sweet)
- I help my child take responsibility for her/his part and I can take responsibility for my part. (Rule of thumb: No blaming allowed.)
- We talk about new ways of dealing with the problem in the future. (Even for very young children, talking out loud about new options will establish a pattern and a feeling that can be repeated through the years.)

Bottom line: It's the relationship (and only the relationship) that will build my child's capacity to organize her/his feelings. My child's problem may look like something that is being done on purpose. But at its root, it's an issue of needing to reconnect and learning to handle difficult feelings in a safe and secure way. By taking an "I can/we can" perspective ("Together, we're going to figure out what you need") my child will realize that I'm in charge as someone who is bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind. This will reassure her/him, feelings will settle and organize, and the relationship will have been repaired.