
The 'Toy Time Out' System

Contributed by Sue Mahar
Thursday, 28 December 2006

Now that Christmas is behind us, exhausted parents may be feeling the post-holiday let down. For weeks, parents have had the promise of 'presents from Santa' in exchange for good behavior. After they have duped Santa into all those presents, kids may feel it's alright to let their behavioral guard down (especially being off from school this time of year, they tend to be testy). It's up to the parents to uphold, with certain authority, the rules of good behavior. The joys and realizations of Christmas are a recent memory, so, what is left to motivate kids and keep them in line now that Santa has fulfilled their Christmas wishes? Fret no more weary parents, for the Crafty Mother has a tried and tested method to share. When my five-year-old starts pushing my buttons, I no longer can threaten 'Do you want me to call Santa and put you on the naughty list?' Instead, I now say, for instance, 'Stop teasing your brother or I will start putting your Christmas presents in a 'time out' (dramatic pause) starting with the Hot Wheels.' I don't go for the ultimate gift, his trains, until I deem it necessary. I start with the middle of the road and work up, if necessary. Children will guard their prized possessions like a mother bear guards her cubs. Sometimes if you threaten a testy child with punishment it is a mild blow to them, but when you are the judge and the jury about to sentence their toys to prison, you may see better results. The 'Toy Time Out' system is an effective way to maintain parental control (babysitters and Nannies included) while fostering personal responsibility. This is cause and effect. A child's time out lasts a few minutes. For certain punishments, that is ineffective. When that is the case, explain that their presents will be put away in a time out for two days. Unlike the empty threat that you will 'throw the toys away' in a fit of anger, the 'Toy Time Out' system is real. These are terms children understand. Stick to your guns. If you take their new toy and sentence it to two days in a time out, keep it out of sight for two days. If they ask you to play with it once things have calmed down, sympathize with them and say, 'I'm sorry, but that toy has been sent to a time out. You may have it back when time out is over.' You know your child well enough, if you parole the toy early, they will have gained power over the situation. Let them feel the weight of the punishment. They will want it and can't have it when they want it. The Toy Time Out system works dually as a reward system. When the toys' sentence is done, a day, a week, whenever the sentence is done, you determine the appropriate time in which to return the toy. You can make that child's day by returning his toy to him when he least expects it. You will both feel proud. After a while, knowing that you mean business, the mere threat of a 'Toy Time Out' will be enough for a child to think twice about their actions. It is equally effective on birthday and special occasion gifts.