Deferred Time-out: A Preliminary Investigation of Obtaining Time-out Compliance

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Time-out: The withdrawal of reinforcers from a child's environment, contingent upon rule violation (Bratton & Doherty, 1983).

Historically, time-out (TO) has been a tool for improving oppositional, defiant, and aggressive behavior (e.g., Clark, Rosebury, Baer, & Baer, 1973; Ford & Ford, 1980; Plumer, Baer, & LeBlanc, 1977; Schrick, Rovine, & Peterson, 1977).

Time-out has been thoroughly researched and has demonstrated its effectiveness across environments including the home, school, and clinic (e.g., Cuenin & Harris, 1986; Crespi, 1988).

Difficulty implementing Time-out Successfully

Many noncompliant children initially resist TO (Robert, 1982).

Some children learn to escape or avoid TO by becoming aggressive or running away (Mansdorf, 1977).

Once TO is repeatedly unsuccessful, parents are likely to become discouraged and ultimately abandon TO.

Current Strategies to Increase Compliance with Time-out

“Put backs:” Returning the child to TO upon escaping TO

Considerable time and physical effort

“Chase me” games are reinforcing to many children

Restraint: Physically preventing the child from leaving time-out. May range in restrictiveness from holding the child’s hand while in time-out, to placing a hand on the child’s shoulder, or physically holding the child in the chair by coming from behind the child and crossing the child’s arms such that the lower arm is locked under the upper elbow.

Physical contact of a hold may initially be reinforcing

Possible physical injury to the child or parents

Spans: Physically hitting the child on the bottom after he/she leaves TO

Spanking is not favored in schools, daycare centers, and agencies

Parents may not be able to discriminate between the use of successful and harmful spans. Spanking may be ineffective in deterring escape from TO and increase the likelihood of physical abuse.

METHOD

Participant

5-year-old male with disruptive behaviors (noncompliance, minor physical aggression, and verbal aggression).

Previous use of traditional TO was ineffective due to the child escaping or refusing to stay in timeout.

Measures

Time-out Latency:

Defined as the length of time between when a TO instruction was given and when a TO was successfully served.

Data were recorded in 1-minute increments ranging from 0 – 30 minutes or >30” if the TO latency exceeded 30 minutes.

Reliability:

Persons present during the TO were recorded (i.e., mom, dad, other adult).

Parent-child interaction:

Data measuring the rate at which social interaction occurred between parent and child were recorded using a partial-interval recording system.

Parents selected a 1-hour block of time to record data across 5-minute intervals.

Parents recorded each interval in which interaction with the child occurred. Verbal or physical.

Interaction initiated by either the child or the parent was marked.

Parent satisfaction:

A parent satisfaction measure was adapted from Kazdin (1980) and developed for this study.

Parents completed the measure at the end of treatment to assess satisfaction of deferred TO.

This measure contains 10 items such as: “How acceptable do you find this intervention to be for your child’s problem?”

Ratings ranged from: 1 = “not at all acceptable” to 7 = “very acceptable” on a 7-point Likert scale. High total scores indicate high satisfaction with the intervention.

Procedures

Prior to baseline data collection parents were provided an operational definition of a “successful TO” and general tips on implementing TO.

Successful TO: Your child remains in a location you have established as TO until you release him or her.

TO Tips:

1) TO duration should not exceed 3 minutes

2) If you suspect that your child will not sit for 3-minutes start with a 30-second TO and slowly increase the length of time to 3-minutes as your child becomes more compliant with TO

3) Do not talk or provide eye contact to your child during TO. Do not wait for your child to stop screaming or crying prior to releasing him or her from TO

Baseline 1:

Parent implemented TO as they typically would (e.g., reminding, bargaining, threatening, removing privileges) in an effort to get their child to TO.

Parent collected TO latency and parent-child interaction data.

Baseline 2:

Parent instructed the child to serve TO after misbehavior. However, parent did not engage the child once the TO instruction was given or use previous strategies to get their child to TO.

Parent collected TO latency and parent-child interaction data.

DEFERRED TIME-OUT

Step 1: A RULE IS BROKEN

The parent sent the child to TO. If the child refused, parents briefly reminded him or her of things the parent would not do for them until TO was served.

Parent did not a) chase the child, b) physically try to put the child in TO, or c) repeatedly remind the child that he or she owed TO.

Until the child complied with TO, the parent did not fulfill any of the child’s requests to play, snuggle, turn on the television, put in a movie, provide a favorite toy, pour a glass of milk, etc.

Parent continued to collect TO latency and parent-child interaction data.

Step 2: NOTIFY OTHER ADULTS

Other caregivers in the home were informed when the child “owed time-out” so that TO was not avoided.

Step 3: ANTICIPATE TANTRUMS

If the child did not comply with TO, the parent drew their attention to another activity in the room and ignored all tantrum behavior from that point on.

The next time the child made a request, the parent reminded their child briefly of appropriate behavior displayed by the child to ensure the child can identify a contrast between time-in and TO.

Step 4: AFTER THE TO IS SERVED

The parent informed the child that the TO was over.

Parents praised, described, or otherwise attended to the next occurrence of appropriate behavior displayed by the child to ensure the child can identify a contrast between time-in and TO.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

TO Latency

Results indicate that it took less time for Adam to comply with TO at follow-up (M=1.5 minutes) compared to Baseline 1 (M=4 minutes).

TO latency data during Baseline 2 strongly suggests that Adam’s TO avoidance was maintained by escape from TO rather than attention from his parent.

Parent-Child Interaction

Results indicate that parent-child interaction data remained stable throughout baseline, treatment, and intervention.

This suggests that children are not likely to avoid their parent when deferred TO is implemented.

Parent Satisfaction

The Total score on the Parent Satisfaction Survey was 68 out of 70, indicating high acceptability of deferred TO.

Deferred TO was rated by the parent to be effective and treat the child humanely.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and assess the effectiveness of a non-restraint procedure that can be used to increase compliance with TO in children who are resistant to this procedure.

Deferred TO offers a solution to children who exhibit escape/avoidance behavior during TO and eliminates the need for physical restraint.