



Why Your Students Should Decide When To Leave Time-Out

Most teachers don't keep their students in time-out long enough.

Five to ten minutes seems to be the norm, but to be most effective, your students need to sit and reflect on their misbehavior for at least fifteen minutes.

Another common mistake is deciding for them when they're ready to return to class.

In other words, the teacher will refer the clock and then say something like, *"Okay, Karla, time's up. You can go back to your seat now."*

But for time-out to really work, for it to discourage future misbehavior, it's best to allow **your students** to decide when they're ready to leave time-out. This doesn't mean, however, that they can simply get up and return to their desk or table group whenever they like.

What it means is that instead of releasing them after fifteen minutes, you'd cruise by their time-out desk and whisper, *"Let me know when you're ready to join us."*

And then only when the student raises her hand, motions you over, and informs you that she's ready to rejoin her classmates would you allow her to leave time-out.

By requiring your students to notify you when they're ready to return (after the initial fifteen minutes), time-out becomes a much more effective consequence.

Here's why:

1. It's an offer of trust.

When you give your students the responsibility to let you know when they're ready to leave time-out, it causes them take ownership of their misbehavior and stirs in them the desire to care and to *want* to follow your rules.

It also sends a subtle message that you believe in them, that you have confidence they can make the right decisions for themselves, learn from their mistakes, and do better next time.

2. It's a greater level of accountability.

Giving students the power to decide when to return to class burdens them with **a greater level of accountability** – making them active rather than passive participants in their improvement.

For they must raise their hand, acknowledge their misbehavior, and convince you with an earnest heart that they've indeed learned a lesson before being welcomed back with open arms.

3. It's an act of contrition.

When a student informs you that they're ready to leave time-out, you must assess their body language, tone of voice, and sincerity before giving the okay to rejoin their classmates.

After having been taught – **through modeling and practice** – how to go to time-out, sit in time-out, and get out of time-out, few students will ask to leave before they're ready. But if they do, simply let them stew awhile longer.

4. It removes the guesswork from time-out.

When you use a specific time period, or your best hunch, to determine when to remove students from time-out, you don't have any idea if the consequence was effective. It's a guessing game.

But by giving your students the power to decide, under the condition that they show you, prove to you, that they're ready to return to class, then you can be sure that the consequence accomplished what was intended.

Student-Centered Time-Out

This student-centered form of time-out will empower your students to take an active role in improving their behavior.

It will encourage them to buy-in, jump on your classroom culture bandwagon, and *choose* to be a contributing member of your class.

By asking them to motion you over, look you in the eye, and proclaim that they're ready to rejoin their classmates, you're encouraging self-reflection and self-responsibility and a greater desire to follow your rules.

It also underscores the notion that your classroom is a special place, a privilege to be a part of.

And when you can widen this gap between the experience of being in time-out, and its personal, active accountability, and the enjoyment of being a full-fledged member of your class...

Then you have the kind of leverage that *changes* behavior, builds **strong community**, and creates a learning experience your students will treasure.