

HOW TO STOP  
ARGUING

WITH YOUR  
CHILD



# How To Stop Arguing With Your Child



By Dr. Sarah Allen



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# **How To Stop Arguing With Your Child**

Thank you for downloading my booklet on how to stop arguing with your child. Parenting can be a lot of fun. There are wonderful moments and then there are the battle of wills and arguments that can really wear you down. If you have got this far, you are probably having a difficult time dealing with arguments between you and your child. It can make you feel powerless and out of control, can't it? This isn't what you expected parenthood to be like but there are things you can do. When your relationship seems to be all battles we can work in two ways to improve things:



- 1. Build up a Positive Relationship**
- 2. Use Effective Consequences**

## **1. How to Build Up A Positive Relationship**

### **a) Know Your Priorities**



It's easy to lose yourself in an endless series of battles. The more your child resists you, the more important it seems to "win" the argument and you can end up demanding things that really don't matter.



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When you are calm, sit down and make a list of priorities and start with the most important.

Are you concerned with mealtime behavior or the way they tease their brother? Start there and try to ignore the small stuff. Similarly, look at your own life, is there something you can cut back on to reduce other stresses at the moment. When we are overwhelmed with life stress it makes it harder to stay calm when faced with difficult behavior.



### b) Be Short and To The Point

Use clear, concise commands. When you want your child to do something, get their attention and eye contact and use a simple direct statement "Johnny, please pick up those toys." This way you can be sure that your child understands exactly what is expected. Only give one command at a time and **only give commands that you are willing to take the time to enforce**. If you want to give a rationale, give it before the command, but do not get drawn in to arguments about why or why not s/he shouldn't do it.

### c). Use Praise and Rewards



When a child does what you've asked them to do or does something that you like (yay!), let them know that is desirable behavior, e.g. "I like it when ....", "You do a good job at.....", "Thank you for picking up the toys". You can also use hugs,



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kisses and so forth to reinforce that you are pleased with them. If you take time to notice and reinforce good behavior, you are likely to get more of it.

Be on the lookout for when your child is doing well, we all tend to only notice when a child misbehaves but not when they're being good. When they see that they are getting positive attention they are less likely to use negative behavior to get your attention.



When problems are always about a specific issue or your child's drive to get what they want right now is exceedingly strong, using praise and attention may not be enough.

This means that you have to make what *you want* more attractive to the child than what the *child wants* to do. Here the use of rewards or privileges can be useful. This can be done using charts or point systems, e.g. chore charts, piano practice

chart, etc... Consult your child about what the rewards or privileges get to be and make sure that the end result is actually attainable and not so far in the future that they won't be motivated to do it.

### d) Ignore Behaviors That You Don't Like

This is a major way to decrease your child inappropriate behavior.

However, it is very important that you use ignoring **every time** a particular behavior occurs otherwise it will become worse rather than better. They will learn that you are inconsistent or that eventually you







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give in. Also, don't start to ignore behavior and then lose your temper, as that will get confusing for your child and reduce your credibility. Leave the room or deep breath and count to 10 to get calm again.

### e) Time to Play

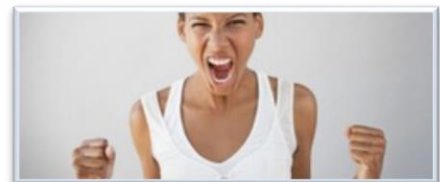
The best way to get a more positive relationship is to set aside between 10 - 20 minutes a day when you can give your child your undivided attention. I know this is hard as we have so much to do but going for 10 minutes or 20 minutes every other day will really help too. Let



them be the one to decide how to spend the time with you and use this time to give them plenty of praise. As your child begins to enjoy being with you, he or she will try harder to please you by doing the things you like. It's really important to use this time to play non-competitive games and activities your child likes to do. It is equally

important that you don't use this time to teach them things or do school work, as the **goal here is not to just spend time with them, but to spend pleasurable time with them.**

When we are frazzled and busy it is easy to lose your calm. Remember that how you interact with your child is a choice. We say and do things without thinking, especially when frustrated, but before saying anything, try to stop and think whether the issue is important enough to get into an argument over.



**If it is worth risking an argument, then use effective consequences to reduce the duration:**



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## 2.) Effective Consequences

### a) Use Specific & Consistent Consequences

If you ask your child to do something and your request is not carried out, **give one (and only one) warning.**

Warnings are "if .... then" statements (e.g. "if you don't pick up those blocks, then you'll have to sit in on the time-out chair", "If you don't get dressed in the next 5 minutes, then we will not have time to go to the park").



Warnings should be given in the firm voice so that your child knows you are serious about the issue. Go on, practice your stern voice. It should be slightly lower in tone than your usual voice with slightly slower speech. If your child complies following the one warning, give immediate praise. If your child still does not do it, use either a **Logical Consequence** or **Time-Out.**

### b) Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are just like they sound, logically connected to the misbehavior and are intended to teach responsible behavior (and hopefully you won't need to say it again next time). Children are better able to see the justice of logical consequences and will accept them with less resentment than punishments unrelated to the misbehavior.





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This shows the child that they have choices, but that it will lead to something unfavorable



happening, e.g. "Thomas, if you throw your sippy cup on the floor then you cannot have it anymore". Be sure though that you are willing to carry through any consequence that you say. If your child is old enough to understand more complex consequences, let them help set the consequences as you stand a much better job that a child cooperates with you if they are

included in the decision-making process. You'll be surprised how often a child will come up with choices and solutions that you would not have thought of. For a logical consequence to teach a lesson, it must be enforced. If the child continues to choose the negative approach or does something they have been told not to, then immediately follow through with the consequences, don't keep giving second, third, fourth chances. That just teaches them that they can keep not listening to you.

### c) How to Use Time Out Effectively

To prepare for this, you will need to find a place to put your child on a chair, step, mat or beanbag where you will be able to see him while you are carrying on with your normal routine. Make sure the chair is far enough away from walls or breakable things to prevent the child from kicking them.

It is really important to remember that Time-Out isn't a punishment. It is a way for your child to calm down so they can then do what you have asked them to or stop doing what you didn't want them to.

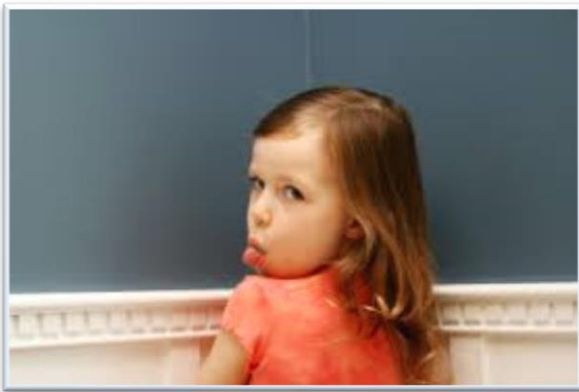




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*The story so far:* you asked your child to do something and she didn't do it. Or she was doing something she shouldn't be doing and you asked her to stop. In a **calm voice**, **firm voice** you told her what she did that you didn't like.



Next you gave her one warning and she still didn't do it or stop. That's when you could use Time-Out instead of a Logical Consequence. Take her to place you we'll call the time-out chair, explain why she is there and how long she has to stay there. Leave her for one minute for each year of her age. While she is in time-out, don't give her eye

contact or get involved in any discussions or arguments.

### She Won't Stay There!

If she keeps coming off the time-out chair, keep putting her back using a firm, but gentle movement. Don't yell or argue, just keep quietly putting her back until she realizes you are committed to keeping her there for as long as it takes. Whatever you do, don't give in at this point. Children need an audience for their naughty behavior. If you simply ignore her tantrum, and remain consistent, she will eventually accept that she has to stay there.

When the time is up, go to her, crouching down to her eye level and ask if she is ready to do what you have asked. If she says yes, give her a warm hug and a smile and make sure she goes and does it immediately. If she is not ready to do it leave her there to calm down some more and check in a minute or so later and ask the same question.



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Once your child has done what you have asked, say in a neutral tone of voice "I like it when you do what I ask". Don't gush over her compliance or give her a reward. Give a hug and a smile. However, you can watch her carefully afterwards so you can catch her next good behavior and praise that.

### He never learns!

I often hear "I put him on the Time-out chair but he keeps doing the same thing again the same or next day." However frustrating this is, you have to keep being consistent. The Time-out chair is not punishment, it is a place to go to calm down until they are ready to do what you have asked. It is more likely to work if everyone who looks after your child does the same technique and has the same rules. They will get tired of it in the end.



The key is to always remain consistent – if he knows that you'll give up after 10 minutes of tantrums, he will continue to scream! You may have to walk him back to the naughty time-out chair ten times in half an hour, but eventually he will get that you are serious and stay there.



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Remember, your role is to teach that the behavior you have said is unacceptable has real consequences. It gives your child the opportunity to think about his actions and to know the importance of saying sorry. When you lose your temper with your kids, both your behavior and your child's behavior can escalate until both of you feel out of control. After losing control parents usually feel guilty and give in. If you stay calm and don't lose your temper, you can carry through with the consequence and then you both can move on to the next activity without feeling bad.



### What age can I start using the Time-out chair?

From about 3 years old you can introduce the Time-out chair/step. A Time-Out Mat is often better for the under 3's than a step or chair as it can be easily moved around the house, allowing you to keep an eye on your child during timeout.

For very young children, try involving them in an activity or distracting them from what's going on instead of using discipline. Anticipate a problem developing, and simply move them into another room, out of the house or engage them in a new activity. Is there a particular toy or something which is triggering the situation which you could just remove? Is your child tired or hungry? We all get cranky when we are tired and hungry! See if you can help resolve her frustration and move her on to another activity rather than disciplining her.



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## What Age Is Too Old?

Every child is different, but for most children, Time-out continues to be useful until about 7 years old. After that age you don't need to supervise them and you can use any area of the



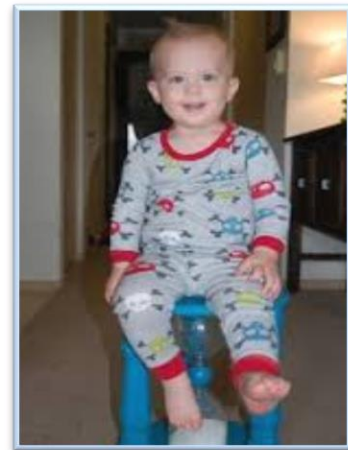
house as a place to go to calm themselves. Remember, time-out is not a punishment in itself. Older kids quickly realize that they can go in to time-out to get out of doing things. Use it instead as a place to calm down and then come back to where everyone else is to discuss the issue properly. After discussion your child should follow through

with doing your original request unless the calm discussion led you to change your request.

## My Child Enjoys the Time-out chair

I hear this quite often. Some children even go there by themselves. What is probably happening is that your child is testing your boundaries. Just ignore him when he's there for fun and follow the techniques above when he is there as a consequence of negative behavior.

Also, make sure you are locating the time-out chair in a quiet place, away from the television, toys or whatever you and the other family members are doing. If you find one chair doesn't work, try another. Sitting somewhere boring is the best place as your child won't want to be there. They want to be with you or where the action is.





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## Conclusion

Whether you prefer to use Logical Consequences or Time-Out it is often easier and more effective to get your child to cooperate by building a positive relationship than by using threats and punishments. By choosing to only react to important issues, you free yourself from constant battling but when you are serious about an issue, you have to be consistent so that your child learns predictable boundaries.

When you first start using these techniques, just choose a couple of issues. A lot of problems will resolve themselves because of the more positive relationship you have from spending playtime with them each day and by cutting back on punishments. By giving your child your positive attention they will enjoy being with you more and will try harder to please you by doing the things you like. When you are consistent and clear in what the acceptable behaviors are, and your child learns the consequences of non-compliance, your child's life is more predictable for them, making them feel more secure and everyone happy.







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For more information about Dr. Sarah Allen's counseling services please visit her website at [www.drSarahallen.com](http://www.drSarahallen.com) or contact her to discuss whether you could benefit from working with her on 847 791-7722 or email her on the contact form on this page [www.drSarahallen.com/contact](http://www.drSarahallen.com/contact).

**Please note: Dr. Allen's professional license only allows her to work with clients who travel to her Northbrook office or via remote sessions within IL.**

Unfortunately, Dr. Allen's professional license doesn't allow her to offer personalized advice by email which is why she likes to write blog posts and booklets so she can share information with people who live too far to see her in person.

You can visit her blog on [www.drSarahallen.com/blog](http://www.drSarahallen.com/blog) or join her on Facebook <https://facebook.com/drsfcallen> to read more psychologically based tips on how to lead the life you want to live.



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## About The Author



Dr. Sarah Allen is originally from the UK but has been living and raising her family in Northbrook, a northern suburb of Chicago, for over 20 years.

She received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Southampton University, England, where she trained in a psychotherapy treatment called cognitive behavior therapy (CBT).

CBT is short-term "here and now" therapy that is a proven effective treatment for a wide range of problems including depression, anxiety, stress, eating /weight issues and relationship problems.

Her skills and 25+ years of experience allow her to get to the root of problems quickly and show you practical ways to feel more in control of your life.

There are many ways we hold ourselves back from happiness. Sarah empowers her clients with the tools necessary to deal with the stress that life and relationships bring, both in the present and for when they show up again in the future.