Does teaching parents to give time-outs hurt their attachment relationships with their children?

16th Annual Conference on Parent-Child Interaction Therapy for Traumatized Children

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Overview

- A little theory
- A little clinical application
- A little data
A little theory
“But the biggest reason we question the value of time-outs has to do with a child’s profound need for connection.”

“You don’t want to send the message that you’ll be in relationship with her when she’s “good” or happy, but you’ll withhold your love and affection when she’s not.”

Siegel & Bryson, 2014, No-Drama Discipline
Why my training and research in attachment theory makes me nervous about time-outs

- There is a profound need for connection.
- Secure attachment is associated with better emotional regulation.
- Concern that time-out may lead to more avoidant strategy for coping with distress.
## Organized Patterns of Attachment

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<tr>
<th>INSECURE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B other</td>
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<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>B4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B other</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A1**: avoidant-ignoring  
- **A2**: avoidant-neutral  
- **B1**: secure-reserved  
- **B3**: very secure  
- **B4**: secure-dependent, secure-feisty, secure-controlling  
- **C2**: ambivalent-resistant  
- **C1**: ambivalent-immature

**Focus on exploration and independence**  
**Balance between attachment & exploration**  
**Focus on attachment relationship/affect**
Secure

safe haven  secure base
Secure

independence

relationship
Insecure
Ambivalent Resistant

independence

relationship
Insecure Avoidant

relationship

independence
Attachment and Emotional Regulation

Secure

- self-regulation
- open expression of distress
- co-regulation
Attachment and Emotional Regulation

Insecure Ambivalent Resistant

heightening distress
co-regulation
Attachment and Emotional Regulation

minimizing distress

self-regulation

Insecure Avoidant
IoWA-PCIT
(Integration of Working Models of Attachment into Parent-Child Interaction Therapy)

Parent

skills

state of mind
IoWA-PCIT
Child-Parent Interaction

behavior

pattern of attachment
A little data
• Is there research on time-out and attachment using well-validated assessments of attachment security?

• No
• Is there research on post-PCIT outcomes using well-validated assessments of attachment security?

• No
### Attachment Prior to IoWA-PCIT

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<tr>
<td>C1</td>
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<td>open expression of distress</td>
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- Focus on exploration & independence
- Balance between attachment & exploration
- Focus on relationship
- Minimization of distress
- Open expression of distress
- Heightening of distress
Attachment Following IoWA-PCIT (Including Teaching Parents to Use Time-Outs)

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Focus on exploration & independence
minimization of distress

Balance between attachment & exploration
open expression of distress

Focus on relationship
heightening of distress
Continuous Attachment Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-IoWA-PCIT</th>
<th>Post-IoWA-PCIT</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security (scale B)</td>
<td>5.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>6.4 (.8)</td>
<td>1.1*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance (scale A)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.8)</td>
<td>1.4 (.9)</td>
<td>-.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resistance (scale C)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.7)</td>
<td>1.7 (.7)</td>
<td>-.6</td>
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Did teaching parents to give time-outs hurt their attachment relationships with their children in these families?

No

none of the families had less secure relationships with their children after parents were taught to use time-out
Do we need more research on the impact of time-outs and PCIT on attachment?

Absolutely