

upcoming events

november @ symbio

Parenting Your Spirited Twins

Tuesday 3 November
7:00 pm

SF Parents of Multiples
*members only event

Every child has moments of willfulness and defiance, that's part of their job, but some kids seem to be born with a double shot of will power - and if you've got twins, this intensifies the struggles. Spirited kids are often the bright and precocious, they live big and leave a wide trail behind them. Parents can look forward to watching them mature into powerful leaders, but often wonder if they will survive their children's toddlerhood and preschool years. We will take a look at the aspects of discipline, boundary-setting, social interaction and communication as they apply to high-octane kids - and the impact of this on the relationship between twins. And, we'll allow plenty of time for stories from the trenches.

Preschool Readiness

Tuesday 10 November
7:00 pm

Lamorinda Moms
*members only event

The notion of preschool readiness refers to a process of determining the developmentally optimal time for a particular child to enter a structured social environment and, when that time comes, selecting the best preschool match from a variety of options. Real life for Bay Area today is a bit different from that ideal. Parents must often begin the process of selecting a preschool long before their child shows signs of readiness; and are often less the "choosers" than the "chooses" when it comes to school selection. In this presentation we use the lens of temperament to help parents understand how to recognize, and facilitate, their child's readiness for a preschool environment. We will also discuss how to prepare children for, and help them through, the process of separating from parents; and provide parents with guidelines for what to expect from a healthy separation process.



q & a

I've heard so much conflicting information about whether or not to use timeouts with our nearly 2.5 year-son. He's got a mind of his own, prone to occasional bouts of selective hearing, and is becoming more resistant to following the rules of our household. I've recently started using timeouts with mixed results but I'm not sure if he's getting the message. His pediatrician told me that timeouts are a good way for kids to learn about the consequences of their behavior - but at the playground last week a group of moms were talking about how timeouts don't work. The truth is sometimes I think we are both a little confused about what is supposed to happen in time out. For example, is it okay if I call a time out just because he's stressing me out? My son is a happy little guy and I want him to be respectful of rules, both in and out of our house, but I don't want to use a technique that's ineffective. Can you please tell me if I'm on the right track?

We hear some version of this question almost every time we speak to group of parents. The key to using timeouts well is being clear about what you hope to accomplish with a timeout, and then being realistic about the possibility of getting the desired outcome by using it. For example, almost every child can learn how to use a timeout to calm down and reset if parents teach them how to

Potty Training

Wednesday 11 November
7-9 pm
@ Peekadoodle Kidsclub
Ghirardelli Square
900 North Point St, F100
San Francisco CA

Using the lens of temperament we will address how to approach getting your child out of diapers and into the bathroom. We will suggest guidelines for timing and choosing a technique, explore some of the strengths and drawbacks of common approaches and provide tools for how to determine what strategies will work best for your particular, unique child. We will also present how temperamentally specific approaches to unexpected setbacks and discuss how to get things on back on track with kids who have stalled-out in the process.

RSVP: info@thepkc.com

Peekadoodle members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple
non-members:
\$45/person or \$65/couple

Setting Limits & Dealing with Temper Tantrums

Monday 23 November

@ Recess Urban Recreation
470 Carolina Street
San Francisco CA

"I don't want to crush his spirit, but I need him to listen to me." "I feel like she goes against me just to make me mad." Parents often ask how to maintain boundaries and structure with kids who seem intent on undermining every plan that is not their own. In this presentation we will discuss how to protect order and maintain your authority in ways that support your child mentally and emotionally. We'll talk about discipline tactics, how to decide when to be firm and when to let go, and developmentally appropriate expectations and techniques for children of various ages.

RSVP:
signup@recessurbanrecreation.com

Recess members:
\$35/person or \$55/couple
non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple

do so, but not every child will be deterred from behavior by the threat of a timeout when it is used as punishment. The phrase "timeout" is used to refer to a variety of practices which have in common confining a child to a prescribed space, or in some cases the chaotic process of parents trying to confine a child to a prescribed space. You may want to use one or a combination of timeout practices with your child, but you will be much more effective if you are clear about what you are doing when the words "time out" trip though your lips after the sippy cup takes flight in the middle of breakfast. It's often easier to do this if you give each kind of timeout its own name. This will also make it easy for your son to understand your intent; and it's important that he know what you intend to do so that he will understand that you have followed through. Here are some suggestions for how to structure and refer to three basis kinds of timeouts:

Taking a Break:

This sort of time out is taken when things are escalating - when you can see that things are getting dicey and you are on a downhill slide to an argument, a meltdown, an aggressive venting session with a sibling, or a standoff. This kind of timeout is not a punishment, it's not a consequence, it's just good emotional hygiene. The point of taking a break is two fold: it gives you and your son a chance to get off the road to trouble and it models the skill of identifying and interrupting a negative cycle for your son. It's the later element that is the most important from a developmental perspective. Helping your son learn how to regulate his emotions is one of your most important tasks as a parent. The more intense and/or strong-willed a child is the more important it is that he gets a chance to practice these skills. So the practice of taking a break is helpful to implement even if, or especially if, it is not always successful in preventing a meltdown. At this age, the best way to do 'take-a-break' timeouts is to take them with your son, rather than sending him away to pull himself together. Start by telling him why you think you and/or he needs a break. Be specific so he learns what the cues are. Tell him how his face or body are telling you he's upset/angry/frustrated, etc. When applicable, tell him what you are feeling that lets you know you need a break. Again, be specific - tell him how your heart is pounding or your jaw is clenching or your feel like you really want to yell or say a bad word. Then have a specific take-a-break action plan. This can be anything that works for you and your son: you can sit down together and breath deeply, give each other an eyebrow massage or read a book that always makes you both laugh. You should also have specific parameters for what ends a break. This can be when you feel like smiling, or your muscles are relaxed, or just at the end of a specific period of time. As your son gets older, you should be able to suggest to him that he might need a break so that things don't deteriorate and occasionally allow him to choose to take one or not. Whatever the outcome when he makes the choice himself, you want to review it with him later and help him to link the effect of taking, or not taking, a break on what happens next. One of the best ways of getting your son to learn to use, and be willing to accept, the suggestion to take-a-break is to put yourself on break outside of the times when you are going on break with him. The day your son independently tells you that he thinks you need to take a break you'll know you've done a good job institutionalizing this practice - then it will your turn to model gracefully accepting the suggestion.

Cool Down Time:

Cool down time happens after things have gone awry. It is not a punishment, it is just a logical interruption of whatever activity or interaction your son was involved in before the behavior that triggered the need for cool down time. What happens in cool down time is very similar to what happens when you take a break - the purpose is just to have enough of an interruption that he's able to reset emotionally. Be sure he understands the purpose of cool down time and that he knows it's not intended to be punitive. Just as with taking a break, you're likely to get some milage out of modeling taking cool down time for yourself; this will help your son understand the purpose of this practice. It will also reduce the feeling that he's being punished when he gets assigned to take cool down time, which usually lowers resistance to the process. If it's helpful, you can take cool

private presentations

Presentations on any topic for groups of 8 or more can be arranged by appointment. For more details, email us at: symbio@symbiosf.com.

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down time with you son. However, for some kids, some time alone is part of what helps them to calm down. If your son is the kind of little guy who has trouble ending a fight as long as there is someone around to fight with, you want to structure cool down time so he's not interacting. Because this is not a punishment, it's fine if he does things that he enjoys during this time. As soon as he has cooled off a bit, cool down time can be over. Assigning cool down time does not take the place of a consequence. It can be used when you want to break up a conflict but don't want to enforce a specific consequence or it can follow or precede a consequence for behavior.

Time-away consequence:

This is the "You are in trouble, now you have a timeout" kind of timeout. It will not work with all toddlers or preschoolers because it's only effective if you can actually enforce a child staying in the designated timeout zone, whether that's a chair or a bedroom, without a wrestling match or a mini-rodeo event. If you use a timeout as a punishment and then cannot enforce it, not only is the discipline ineffective, you've also undermined your own authority with your son because you lost control of the situation. By the time your son is 4 - 5 years old, you will be able to say to him "You just got a time-away consequence for (fill in the blank) and you need to head to your room before I count to ten, if you don't get there by then, you will (lose some other privilege)." At that age he'll have the cognitive understanding necessary for this either/or kind of consequence to be emotionally meaningful to him and your authority will hold no matter what he does. But at his current age, even if he understands the concept, the connections will be less clear than the simple formula of a clear, immediate consequence for behavior which crosses a line. If you can't keep your son in a designated spot or room, don't use a time-away consequence. You can use rebukes and removing privileges or objects as consequences instead. If he will stay within the confines of the timeout space, then forge ahead. It's fine if you have to walk him to his room, close the door, etc. to enforce the boundary. The key to getting a time-away consequence to work is keeping your son's part of it very simple. Don't layer requirements. For example, demanding that he apologize or stay in his room until he is able to say what he did wrong. These expectations can lead you to secondary power struggles, which will also often cost you your authority. A good time-away consequence is just about a child staying in the designated space for the designated amount of time. If your son fusses and yells the whole time he's there, or stomps around, that's fine. If you don't tell him not to do so, you don't need his cooperation to make good on your word. When your son gets a consequence he is likely to be in state where his self-control is low and his desire to oppose is high; this isn't a time when you want to depend on his assistance to get the job done. The consequence should be over at the end of a designated period of time. The one-minute per year of age rule is a good guideline, but it can be a stretch for some kids with low frustration thresholds. So, if you know your son will stay in his room and struggle to organize himself for 90 seconds, make that the length of the consequence. If at the end of the time, he's obviously still too upset to have a chance of a peaceful reentry to family life, you can then use a "taking a break" or "cool down" timeout to help him regain his composure, but the punishment is over and your role is now one of a helper rather than an enforcer. Many parents feel undermined in the effective use of this kind of consequence by kids who don't seem upset about being sent away. Don't get sucked into this trap. You don't want to keep upping the ante by trying to find a consequence that upsets your son - this will usually lead to escalating emotional conflict, which also tends to weaken your authority. It is important that parents of kids who are headstrong enough to inure themselves to punishment focus on consistency and follow-through rather than trying to prevent misbehavior. Some kids need to learn rules by breaking them repeatedly and then experiencing consequences. Your son's fondness for an occasional battle may put you in this category. Counterintuitive as it seems to their frustrated parents, for more oppositional kids, the unpleasantness of the consequence is much less important to the lesson than the consistency with which it is enforced. In these instances, we'll encourage you to take comfort in the fact that your clarity and follow through are providing the structure necessary for your son's development.