



Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County

Alternatives to Domestic Aggression

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THE PROBLEM WITH “TIME-OUTS”

WHY WE STOPPED USING “TIME-OUTS” IN OUR BATTERER INTERVENTION SERVICE

In 1986 we initiated the ADA program hoping to accountably offer intervention services to batterers and, like most programs, looked for tools that were already in use at the time. One of the most popular and prized (even to this day) was the “*Time-out*”. The following statements are some of the reasons, historic problems, and theories behind our collective decision to move away from the use of “Time-outs”.

1. “Time-outs” are batterer intervention service enforced isolation of the survivor/victim.
2. “Time-outs” perpetuate the myth that excited emotional states are to blame for battering behavior.
3. “Time-outs” perpetuate the myth that men need to do something other than make a choice to be non-abusive regardless of their surroundings or circumstances.
4. “Time-outs” set up the dynamic that if she “doesn’t cooperate” with his “Time-out” she is “uncooperative” and then becomes identified as “the aggressor”, as “not cooperative with the program”, and “not cooperative with his recovery”.
5. “Time-outs” reward the batterer for believing that his abuse is inevitable by giving him a consistent, repeated “vacation” from the interaction that was occurring before the “Time-out”, and all other household/family responsibilities are then foisted upon the survivor/victim while he is off having his break.
6. “Time-outs” ignore the fact that, no matter who this particular batterer is and what his battering history is; all batterers have had success remaining in stressful and unpleasant situations before without choosing to be abusive. An example would be a batterer being stopped and harassed by a police officer, or a batterer being talked to by a boss in a manner that he considers abusive. There is absolutely no accountable argument that can be made why a man can exhibit non-abusive skills in one setting and not in another. Hence, what argument can be made that a batterer needs a “Time-out” at home when he doesn’t need them at work?

7. A “Time-out” is literally a “Time-out” *from* accountability. Although most of us consider “Time-out” a productive and “safe” option for a batterer to use instead of being abusive, in fact it is another tool that can be used to control and manipulate survivor/victims and reveals our (social service providers) desire for quick fixes and easy solutions without a careful and thoughtful analysis of the dynamics involved.
8. Critically analyzing the premise upon which the “Time-out” is based reveals that “Time-outs” are inappropriate and destructive tools based upon faulty concepts. If you are using “Time-outs”, or are thinking about using them with batterers, you have a responsibility to at least consider the conceptual basis you believe you have for using them.

For example:

- a. Is it because you think batterers will be abusive when they become emotionally excited?
 - b. Is it because you think batterers will be abusive because they are feeling victimized?
 - c. Is it because you think batterers will be abusive because they don’t have the “communication” or “emotional skills” necessary to act otherwise?
 - d. Is it because you think batterers must be separated from the survivor/victim(s) so that he will not become abusive?
 - e. Is it because you believe a batterer needs some given amount of time to “collect his thoughts” so he won’t “do something he wishes he wouldn’t”?
 - f. Is it because you believe the survivor/victim must acknowledge that her batterer is “working productively to end his abuse”?
9. What dynamics are created when a batterer *returns* from a “Time-out”? Is the batterer supposed to talk about why he took the “Time-out”, or not talk about it? Does it matter which he does from the survivor/victim(s) perspective with regard to how intimidated she will feel or how grateful he/we expect her to be?
 10. Batterers use “Time-outs” primarily as a tool to manipulate their survivor/victims. This includes using “Time-out” when they are “losing an argument” and need a stalling technique, using “Time-out” to plan their strategy for “winning” an argument or discussion, and using “Time-out” to escalate their “victim self-talk” so as to further their belief that they are righteous in their battering.

Those batterers who *were* obviously struggling to learn how to live in a nonviolent, non abusive, accountable manner said they didn’t use time-out’s because of their belief that time-out’s were inconsistent with an accountable analysis of domestic violence.

Thanks to Phyllis Frank for challenging our thinking with regard to using "Time-out's".