

SKAGIT FAMILY STUDY CENTER

THERAPEUTIC PARENTING TOOLS

For Parents and Professionals



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Please check out our free website for a step-by-step tour through a Five Step Self Time Out:

<http://www.selftimeout.org>

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PARENTING TOOL BOX

Nine Therapeutic Parenting Tools
For Parents and Professionals

Third Edition



Created By

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FOUR BASIC IDEAS

1. Mistakes are precious. Humans can learn the most difficult lessons from their mistakes. Guilt and Shame and Fear make learning from our mistakes less likely. Children are born with the equipment to learn from experience. The parent's job is to keep them (to the extent possible) from being hurt physically or emotionally and to provide structures so that they know they are making mistakes **without** keeping them from learning from their mistakes. If an adult in authority is acting out when a child has made a mistake, the child focuses on learning what the adult is up to **not** on learning from whatever mistake the child may have made. The adult will not get their needs met.

Acting out behavior is a natural process for children. Children are struggling to tell us about their feelings and needs without words. Acting out can be viewed as "Bad" but if we choose to do this, the consequence for us will be that our children will continue to act as if they are not being heard. The desired learning will not happen until the adult changes their approach.

If I allow my mood to change when a child is acting out (i.e. seeing the behavior as "Bad") I am drawing the attention of the child to myself; I am choosing to get between the child and their consequences. The child's natural process of development will be delayed.

2. It is generally thought that the only function of time-outs and privilege loss is to provide a consequence for poor choices. A less understood but more important function of time-outs is to: (1) Stop engaging with what is escalating me. (2) Quiet my voice and my body and Focus on my own feelings and needs. (3) Reflect on Identifying, Labeling and Processing my feelings and needs. (4) Make a new plan based on taking responsibility for taking care of my own feelings and needs. (5) Praise myself for taking good care of myself.

An argument can be made that these **FIVE STEPS**, repeated over and over again, provide the information and experiences that move development from one stage to another. As development becomes not just a biological process but more of a bio-social process, these **FIVE STEPS** give us what we need to continue moving through more and more socially complex stages of development.

Choosing to take **FIVE STEP** time-outs and dealing with privilege loss is how human beings learn to become more mature.

3. Don't be patient! Delay leads to escalation. Work on consequencing quickly and without escalation. Healthy children act out until their need is met. Delay escalates everyone involved. Don't miss opportunities to provide the learning structure the child is asking you to give them. When we give children repeated chances to make poor choices before we provide a consequence, we teach them to manipulate us. At the same time we risk escalating ourselves and getting into a power struggle with them.

4. All real change is voluntary. Real respect is voluntary. Every human has a right to say "no" even if it means they are choosing negative consequences. True choice exists when the parent demonstrates a willingness for the child to choose the negative consequence.

We want to teach kids how to make **safe decisions** in the world... not to be **obedient**. When we teach them to be obedient to authority we teach them to be victims to predators. (Children get angry when we do this. It doesn't make sense to them.) Real respect is voluntary.

SAFETY

We in the Skagit Family Study Center believe that safety is the most important thing. Change will be resisted and learning will be stunted until safety is established for each individual. In order to increase safety we believe the following commitments are the highest priorities:

1. When adults and/or children choose consequences that create danger for themselves or others the question is not whether they have the right to choose danger. People sometimes do choose danger whether they have a right to or not. The problem is that when one person chooses danger they choose other consequences as well and they create consequences for others.

2. When anyone acts in a dangerous way it is important that they be given consequences that are clearly connected with their actions and with little, if any, drama to distract them from learning. When people are not given the consequence they ask for (by making dangerous choices) the level of safety decreases until, eventually, someone gets hurt.

3. Sometimes a dangerous choice creates unsafety but is not necessarily illegal. (Emotional abuse, reckless behavior and frightening behavior.) In these situations it is important to invite the person to get help, to get help in dealing with them or to form a team of caring people to form around the person who is making dangerous choices. The team must not force the acting out person to do anything, but the team can offer support and resources to the person. The team can also feel empowered if necessary to document the legal but dangerous choices so that eventual legal consequences are more likely to happen before anyone is hurt.

4. Sometimes a dangerous choice is illegal and requires official involvement and consequences to increase safety and decrease consequences for others. (Violence, threats of violence, substance abuse, violations of the physical boundaries of others and physical destructiveness.)

5. These days police officers are more truly "Peace Officers" than ever before. More and more police officers are trained and skilled in de-escalating domestic situations and creating safety. At a time when many parents are isolated and have little outside support it is important for parents to know they can utilize the skills of local police organizations to prevent unsafe situations from turning into tragedies. If you encounter a police officer who does not have these skills it is OK to seek clarification of the situation with local officials. Many local organizations are willing to help responsible parents establish good relations with local police to get emergency help for families in trouble.

6. When I am unwilling to seek help outside the family to help me create safety I may be choosing tragic consequences.

CHOICE BASED STRUCTURE vs COERCIVE STRUCTURE

Structure is the social contract we present to a child and how we present it.

COERCIVE STRUCTURES

(The consequence of using Coercive Structure is that a healthy child will resist in some way. **Safety decreases.**)

- Forming the thought, "How can I **get** my child to _____?"
- Spanking and the threat of spanking. Getting a child to move by grabbing them and moving them. Any threat.
- Inviting them to feel guilt, shame or labeling them in negative or teasing ways.
- Disappointment, escalation and drama of any kind on the part of the parenting person.
(The consequence of using drama is that the attention of the child is drawn away from their poor choice and it's consequences.)
- Changing body language, tone of voice, volume of voice, intensity of voice.

CHOICE BASED STRUCTURES

(The consequence of using Choice Based Structure is that resistance will decline and be less intense. **Safety increases.**)

- Forming the thought, "How can I create a choice structure for my child?"
- Always respecting their physical and emotional boundaries and consequencing them when they violate the boundaries of others.
- Being willing to **follow through** with each direction/refusal/consequence process even if it means stopping everything for hours.
- The difference between Coercion and Choice boils down to whether I am willing to accept my child choosing negative consequences.
- Keeping faith in the child's ability to learn when I keep the consequences clear and avoid drawing attention to myself.

Notes on privileges:

Everything the child does or has is a potential privilege loss except safety, boundaries, food, shelter, love and education. (Safety, boundaries, food, shelter, love and education are rights not privileges.) Privileges the child values most today are probably the most effective consequence today. Ignore the child who says, "I don't care what you take away." Find ways to provide earned privileges for any movement in the right direction. Be generous with earn-backs. Always make sure there is something that your child can choose to earn quickly.

ROLE OF SUPPORT PERSON

When a person asks for support the support person can...

- listen. Check with them to make sure you are hearing accurately. (People who feel heard feel supported.)
- avoid being critical, blaming or shaming anyone.
- remind them to take Time-Outs.
- remind them that their awareness of danger comes from being aware of how they feel.
- remind them that their information about solving problems comes from their feelings.
- be willing to listen while they identify, label and talk about their feelings.
- respect them by being confident that they can resolve their problems using their inner resources and communicating and processing their feelings.
- remind them that they will feel more competent and powerful when they respect the boundaries of others and demand respect for their own boundaries.

Please Remember:

- Support people have no right to judge or criticize the person needing support, other family members (or anyone for that matter).
- Support people have no right to force or coerce or pressure any family member to do anything.

- Support people must avoid causing more trouble than already exists.

WHEN TO GET ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

It is time to get additional help from support people when you are feeling...

- angry at your co-parent and feel hopeless about sharing your feelings with them.
- you shouldn't have to change in order to meet the needs of your kids.
- fearful and having trouble creating safety.
- frustrated and having trouble taking a time-out your self.
- depressed and having trouble paying attention.
- tired and having trouble getting rest.
- like a victim and don't know how to get your needs met.
- angry and don't want to stop blaming others.
- disappointed and feel like it is OK to make the other person feel bad.
- like you are doing the best you can and still feel like you are failing as a parent.
- feeling unsafe.

ROLES OF PARENT AND CHILD

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLES

All humans need to play particular roles at different times in their development. The roles help us feel safer but the natural tensions created by the role challenge us to grow in our maturity. (MATURITY = Our ability to take time-outs and to learn, at a higher level of complexity, how to process our feelings.)

Parent Role

Parents have immense power when viewed from the child's point of view. The parent's role is to keep kids safe and to teach them how to keep themselves safe as they become adults. Children depend on their parents to know what to do with difficult emotions and feelings. It is the parent's job to either have the abilities their children need them to have or to get help from other family members, the community or professionals in order to meet the needs of the children. It is the job of parents to teach their children how to Identify, Label and Process feelings by providing clear rules, structure, consequences, clear unescalated communication and by providing a model.

Child Role

Children are very vulnerable. Children naturally form dependant relationships with the adults responsible for them. It is natural for children to be in a process of learning how to be safe in the world. Children's role is to be learning from their mistakes and successes how to be safe in the world.

Children can learn how to keep themselves safe in the world by manipulating the people and situations around them, as a person would play chess. On the other hand when we can create a safe and structured learning situation our children can learn how to be fully empowered, respected and respectful members of the community.

It is the role of children in the family to learn how to be safe in the world. This means learning how to take self-time-outs and use them to learn how to identify, label and process feelings with others. The parenting adults can set up choice/consequence structures within which the children can choose to learn these skills in a relatively safe atmosphere.

STRATEGIES THAT WILL WORK

- Taking a time-out when you are starting to see your red flags.
- Not trying to be patient. Consequences given quickly and without escalation.
- Consequencing with a quiet voice and a quiet body.
- Choosing not to be in power struggles.
- Consequences short and small but more frequently given the first time the child makes a poor choice.
- Consequences with one warning after rules are established or clear directions have been given.
- Small consequences with earn backs.
- Earn backs used at the time consequences were chosen.
- Adult consistency. Adult constancy.
- Point systems that are closely watched and adjusted. Earn backs applied as needed.
- No threats.
- Clear rules and directions. Parents or caregivers who cannot be spilt.
- When things are not working consider that you may not be parenting in a way that makes success possible for the child. (Restudy and get more opinions about the developmental needs of the child.)
- Supervision and feedback tuned to the actual needs of the child.
- Structured and unstructured time tuned to the needs of the child.
- Time-out used only to teach kids how to Identify, Label and Process feelings so they can learn to differentiate between positive and negative consequences.
- Negative consequences seen as only part of a process of teaching children necessary skills.
- Reward/reinforcement used for even very small or incremental progress. (The goal is **progress** not perfection.)
- Short term and incremental rewards are more effective than long-term rewards.
- Choosing to play the role of parent to teach skills by properly administering praise and consequences **not** to achieve control.
- Avoid using "Disappointment" as a tool. Try structuring a consequence instead. If you are feeling disappointed it is time to get more support.
- Use a minimum number of rules. One rule can be, "Follow directions first time asked."
- Thinking, "How can I create a choice structure so my child can learn how to _____?"
- Encourage the child to take credit for **all** their accomplishments even if you helped a whole lot!!!
- If you feel like you are praising too much try to get more specific about what you are praising them for. Praise some more.

STRATEGIES THAT WILL FAIL

- Not taking a time out when you are starting to see your red flags.
- Patience leading to frustration or anger.
- Yelling.
- Power struggles both emotional and physical.
- Consequences too big or too long.
- Consequences without warnings, established rules or clear directions.
- Big consequences without earn backs.
- Earn backs used impulsively or as part of power struggles or after the consequence has been in effect for too long.
- Adult inconsistency. Adult inconstancy.
- Point systems that allow children to go too far into a hole.
- Idle threats. Any threats.
- Lack of clear directions or rules. Parents or adults that can be split.
- Warnings given repeatedly even when a rule or direction is established.
- Expectations that are below or above the current demonstrated voluntary abilities of the child.
- Lack of supervision and feedback.
- Excessive, unstructured time.
- Inappropriate use of Time-out as emotional or physical punishment.
- Too much reliance on negative consequences.
- Not enough (or not sufficiently motivating) reward/reinforcement.
- Imbalance between short-term and long-term rewards.
- Using blame, guilt and shame to try to achieve power or control.
- Disappointment.
- Too many rules.
- Thinking, "How can I get my child to do this?"
- Taking credit for the child's accomplishments.
- Not enough praise.

A TIME-OUT IS...

- the process through which humans learn to identify, label and process feelings and in the process learn to choose between positive and negative consequences.
- an adult directed or self directed **but always voluntarily chosen or self-initiated** isolation and quiet reflection time.
- when a person begins to take Self-Time-Outs it is the first sign that a person is learning to behave in a more emotionally mature way.
- an opportunity to calm (or avoid) an escalating situation.
- an opportunity to create safety or move out of an unsafe situation.
- a far more effective alternative to physical or emotional coercion.
- a way for a parent to get their own needs met and choose more positive consequences by choosing to use mature structure instead of power struggle and control.
- an effective teaching/learning tool.
- using choice based structures to teach the essential skills of: 1. Taking responsibility for one's own behavior. 2. Respecting the boundaries of others. 3. Standing up for one's own boundaries.
- an effective way to intervene to extinguish acting-out behavior and teach alternatives.
- for children **and** adults.
- most effective when all adults working with a child use the same approach.
- most effective when there is a specific, parent determined place for time out that is in the same area the family is in.
- most effective when brief and frequent instead of long and rarely or impulsively applied when poor choices are being made.

A TIME-OUT MUST NOT BE...

- a form of punishment or judgment or coercion.
- a way to avoid relationship.
- a tool to avoid working out a problem.
- a way to withdraw love.
- a way to impose guilt or shame.
- a way to make the individual feel "bad" about what has happened.
- a way "to get someone to do something".
- like jail (exclusion from the group must be kept to a minimum).
- an opportunity to **control** a situation.
- an involuntary process. (If it is in any way involuntary the healthy child will resist.)
- part of a process of physical or emotional coercion.
- part of a power struggle.
- just for children.
- expected to work when only one parent is invested in using them properly.
- too long or too isolated.
- expected to work effectively by a single adult in isolation.

HOW TO FEEL LESS PANIC

When you feel stressed take a self time out, look at your Tool Box and see the options you have created.

You can build a big Tool Box.

- Be willing to choose to take time outs sooner rather than later.
- Be willing to choose **not** to “Get that kid to do _____”
- Be willing to choose to create structures so that the child has a clear choice between following the rule (or the direction) and choosing to have a negative consequence.
- Be willing to develop at least a three person deep support system. Be willing to use it.
- Connect with your co-parent. (If this isn't possible get help!)
- Be willing to use the police sooner rather than later to help de-escalate the situation if things get dangerous or if threats are made.
- Be willing to stop buying excuses for unsafe behavior.
- Remember that everything is a potential removable privilege loss except safety, boundaries, food, shelter, love and education.
- (Safety, boundaries, food, shelter, love and education are rights not privileges.)
- Remember that the privileges the child values most today may be the most effective consequence today.
- Be willing to consequence every time the child makes a poor choice instead of being patient. (Patience leads to escalation and panic.)
- If a direction or a consequence is refused set up a clocked consequence. “For every minute you refuse to start with the dishes (start your time out etc.) you are choosing 15 minutes of early bedtime tomorrow.” If they choose hours and hours of consequence provide an earn-back.

SAMPLE CHOICE STRUCTURES:

Sample Structure Number 1:

Four-year-old Sally takes a step toward learning about processing feelings and the nature of negative consequences with dad's help when she refuses to follow the direction to stop kicking the leg of the table:

“Sally, I see that you have *chosen* not to follow directions. You have *chosen* a two minute time-out.”

After Sally finishes the two-minute time-out:

“Sally, good job taking your time-out. Do you remember what you were doing when you *chose* a time-out?”

“Yes dad. I was kicking the table leg.”

“Do you remember what you were feeling when you kicked the table leg?”

“No.”

“Well Sally I remember when I was about your age I used to get so angry that I would stamp my feet. I found out later that I could get some attention by just asking my mom or dad for help. It worked better than feeling hurt then acting angry. Can you try to ask for help next time you feel like kicking something?”

“I don't think so dad.”

“Well that's OK Sally you may need to *choose* quite a few time-outs before you learn to ask for help. Sometimes it takes a long time for me to learn something. Good job taking a time out, being honest and sharing your feelings.”

Sample Structure Number 2:

Fourteen-year-old Sam takes a step toward learning about processing feelings and the nature of negative consequences with mom's help when he makes a poor choice and then refuses to accept the negative consequences. He also finds out what happens when he tries to manipulate mom into a power struggle and tries to split mom and dad:

"Sam, I see you have *chosen* to bring your muddy shoes into the house. You have *chosen* a two minute time out."

"NO! YOU ARE JUST STUPID! I DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME!! I'LL TELL DAD YOU HIT ME!!"

"Sam, I see you are choosing additional consequences. For every minute you refuse to take your time out you are choosing ten minutes of early bed time."

Twenty minutes have gone by and Sam has chosen over three hours of early bedtime. His mom has spent the time in another room timing herself out. Sam was stewing in his room playing a video game. He finally chooses to take his two-minute time out and is finished.

"Sam, good job taking your time-out. Do you remember what you were doing when you *chose* a time-out?"

"No!"

"You *chose* to bring your muddy shoes into the house. Then you refused a time out." Do you remember what you were feeling when you came in the house?

"I was angry because Jordan hit me and I didn't hit him back."

"Good job sharing your story Sam. So you were angry because you didn't hit Sam back?"

"Yes."

"Well I can understand you being angry. What do you think you can do next time you are angry that won't be a choice for big consequences?"

"Well, I guess I could ask for help."

"Good job Sam!! Good job taking a time out. You have chosen over three hours of early bedtime because you took twenty minutes to take your time out. We can set up an earn back. For every hour you follow directions first time asked and accept consequences immediately you will earn back 30 minutes of regular bed time."

"OK mom."

"Now I need you to take your dirty shoes out on the porch, brush the dirt off of them and vacuum the floor here in the entry way."

"OK mom."

"Good job, Sam. Great job not hitting Jordan back. I will talk to Jordan's parents."

SELF TIME OUT FLOW CHART

Time outs are what mature humans do to learn from mistakes and poor choices. When a person (adult or child) chooses to take a self time out or a called time out they are choosing to care about the safety of themselves and the family to which they belong.

YOU are choosing to reduce impulses, reduce danger and increase positive consequences.

1 I can declare a...
SELF TIME OUT.
 "I am taking a time out."

2 I can choose to focus on what is happening
INSIDE not OUTSIDE
 my **BODY.**
 I can choose to **STOP** paying attention to what I believe is irritating me.



3 I can choose to **WRITE DOWN** my **FEELINGS and NEEDS.**
 I can gather important new information from my deepest **FEELINGS and NEEDS.**
 I can honor my **FEELINGS and NEEDS.**

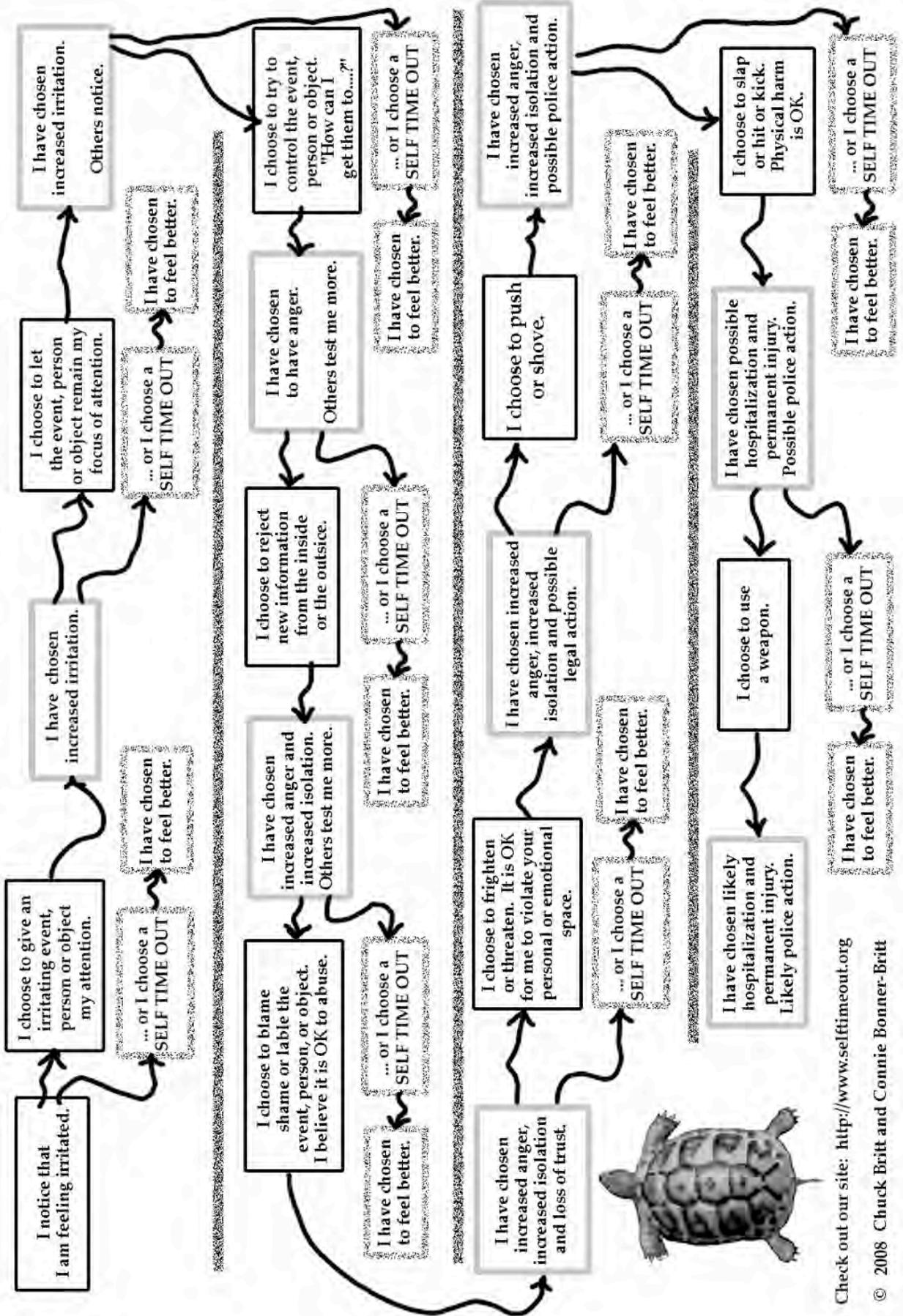
4 I can choose to make a **NEW PLAN.**
 I will use my new info. to write a **NEW PLAN** for **ME** to take care of **MYSELF.**
 I have chosen to stop waiting for someone or something that is irritating me to help me feel better.

5 **I CAN PRAISE MYSELF.**
 I took a **SELF TIME OUT.**
 I changed my focus.
 I paid attention to my own **FEELINGS and NEEDS.**
 I made **NEW PLAN** to take care of myself.

Check out : <http://www.selftimeout.org>

TIME OUT OPPORTUNITY FLOW CHART

I can continue escalating or I can take a SELF TIME OUT and avoid negative consequences.



FEELINGS, NEEDS AND PLANS CHART

I CAN CHOOSE TO WRITE DOWN MY FEELINGS AND NEEDS.

{See {#3} on the Self Time Out Flow Chart}

NO.	FEELING OR NEED WORD	OWNED SENTENCE	I HAVE ENOUGH SUPPORT?
1.		I feel _____ I need _____	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
2.		I feel _____ I need _____	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
3.		I feel _____ I need _____	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

I CAN MAKE A NEW PLAN FOR ME TO TAKE CARE MYSELF.

{See #4 and #5 on the Self Time Out Flow Chart}

PLAN NO.	SUPPORT PEOPLE	PLAN FOR TAKING CARE OF MY FEELINGS AND NEEDS.	I PRAISED MY GOOD WORK?
1.	1. 2. 3.		YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
2.	1. 2. 3.		YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	1. 2. 3.		YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

If I don't feel better after following through with these plans I can look MORE CLOSELY at my feelings and needs. I can get more or different support and I can make a different plan.

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 Please check out our website for a step by step tour through a Five Step Time Out at:
<http://selftimeout.org>