

1,2,3 Magic

(adapted from the video 1,2,3 Magic by Dr Thomas Phelan, Ph.D)

One of the biggest mistakes made by parents and carers of children is that they think if they reason with the child, when the child is misbehaving then the child will listen to what you say and respond appropriately. Unfortunately, when children get worked up over something they tend to stop listening. Therefore, this method takes the "talk" out of disciplining the child.

The 1,2,3

The child gets three chances. Then they are sent to their room (or timeout chair if at preschool).

The child misbehaves... "That's 1"
Continues... wait five seconds... "That's 2"
Continues... wait five seconds... "That's 3. Take 5"

'Take 5' means that child is to go to timeout and stay there for five minutes, or for however long thought necessary (depending on the age of the child or the severity of what they have done can use a longer or shorter timeout).

After the timeout the child comes out (or if they do not realise the time is up – let them know). Although tempting to do say something to the child such as "Now you'll behave or it will happen again", or "Now are you going to be a good boy for mummy/daddy/carer?" The behaviour is 'forgotten' and not brought up.

Note: If using the child's bedrooms timeout room make sure that there is no phone, no computer (play station, X-box) and no friends.

Different behaviours are added up:

Example: Answer back "That's 1"
Push sister "That's 2"
Answer back "That's 3, take 5"

However, this has to occur within a 15-minute time frame. For example, if the child answers back and then 20 minutes later pushes his sister, then start from 1 again "clean slate".

In severe cases:

If the child learns a new naughty word and then uses it:

Example: Mum turns TV off and child says, "You bitch!" Then straight away, "That's 3, take 5" (or more). Then after timeout talk to them about why that word should not be used.

Example: Child steals a bike. "That's 3, take 5" (or more). Then talk about why it was the wrong thing to do.

Other situations

Others over

Kids with or without parents

- Count child as if no one is over
 - If gets to three then child has to go to room, friend cannot go
 - Explain to friend what is happening
- OR
- Count the other child as well
 - If the child's parent is over get permission first
- OR
- After counting to timeout three times, can tell them to play outside

Parents with or without their kids

- Count as usually would

Grandparents

- Count with you (e.g. mum says, "That's 1"; grandma says, "That's 2"; mum or grandma can say "That's 3".)

Public

- Count as usually would
- Timeout use:
 - Car
 - Corner of store
 - Stand there and hold their hand – but not talk to them
 - Bathroom
 - If the child is old enough – make them sit outside
- Use bribery – e.g. "If your good, good meaning you don't hit 3, I will buy you..."

Car trips

Short trips

- If get to 3, nobody talks for 5 minutes
- Pull car to side of the road for 5 minutes
- 1,2,3 → pay fine

Long trips

- E.g. "For every 15 minutes that you behave you will earn 25cents. You can both earn it or both lose it."

On the phone

- Count them as if you weren't on the phone

Trash room

- Don't clean it up
- Continue to count aggressively, do not become defensive
- If you think that there is chance the child may trash his or her room then take out any valuables or objects that the child could use to harm him or herself.

Sibling rivalry

- Count both of them
- Never ask, "Who started it?" or "What happened"

- Never expect the older child to be more mature
- If you don't see it, you don't count it
- But if you can hear it, you can count it

Temper tantrums

- Don't start timing the timeout until they have stopped tantruming

Pouting

- Ignore it
- Unless 'aggressive pouter' → follow you around pouting → then count it

Testing & Manipulation

- They test to try and get their way
- Or they use it as revenge because they do not get their way

Forms of testing and manipulation

1. Badgering
 - Follow you around continually asking/nagging
 2. Intimidation
 - Yelling, screaming, tantrums
 3. Threat
 - Verbal threats such as "I'll never see you again!!"; "I'll kill myself!!"
 4. Martyrdom
 - Crying, pouting, "Nobody loves me!"; "You never give me anything!"
 5. Butter up
 - Do or say something to make you feel good
 6. Physical
 - Running away, hitting
- Can count behaviours 1 to 4 using the 1,2,3.

Implementing the program

- Tell the kids what is happening.
- "If you do something that you shouldn't be doing we are going to say 'that's 1'. That means that you should stop what you are doing. If you do not stop we are going to say, 'that's 2'. If you keep going we are going to say 'that's 3, take 5'. That means that you go to your room for 5 minutes, then you can come out again and all is forgotten. No apologies, no explanations".

Encouraging Start Behaviours

1. Sloppy Verbal Positive Feedback (SVPF)
 - Erratically give positive verbal feedback tailored to the child
2. Kitchen Timer
 - Set timer and get them to beat it
 - If they turn it off, "That's 1..."
3. Docking System
 - Child has an allowance
 - For example, "Will you please feed the dog by 6pm? If you don't I will do it, but I charge 20cents to feed dogs."
 - Don't argue with them, if they try to argue use the 1,2,3.
 - Cannot use the docking system for homework
4. Nature Consequences
 - Let the world take care of it
 - E.g. if the child is not doing homework for the first time, let the child and teacher handle it
 - E.g. doesn't want to eat breakfast, don't make him/her
5. Charting
 - Find a behaviour that you want to work on and record it when done
 - Add them to earn some reward, or as part of an allowance
 - Only have 3 or 4 things on the chart at any one time
 - Build up to a good rewards for getting off whole chart
6. 1,2,3
 - Can use the 1,2,3 for start behaviours that take less than minutes to complete
 - E.g. "Please pick up coat"...no response "That's 1"...wait five seconds, "that's 2"...wait 5 more, "That's 3, take five."
 - If they don't take it with them repeat two more times. Then if they don't, use the docking system.

Troubleshooting Common Behaviours

Cleaning rooms

- Close the door
- Weekly clean up routine, if they clean it once a week, then don't harass them on the other days
- *Laundry*
 - Young children → charting
 - Older children → natural consequences

Eating

- Give very small portions and use kitchen timer, if don't eat by kitchen timer, take it away. Can leave it for them to eat later if they get hungry
- Use SPVF and give more if hungry

Bed time

- Give them a set bedtime, for example 9pm. Then at 8.30pm say, "If you get everything finished before 9pm then in the left over time you can have a story or alone time..." or whatever they choose.

1 2 3 MAGIC

(2-12yrs)

Benefits

- 50% cooperate immediately
- 50% 'test' but tend to oblige within 7-10 days (if the technique is not effective within 3 weeks further evaluation may be necessary)
- Good for stopping behaviours you want to stop (e.g. sibling rivalry, yelling, arguing, tantrums)
- Teaches behavioural self control
- Simple, effective, shows who is the boss, authority is non-negotiable, it is not tiring, decreases frustration and arguments
- Explanations are not required for most of the behaviours (with the exception of 'major stop' behaviours and new behaviours)
- After some time the parent/carer/teacher should get a good response on the count of 1 or 2

Difficulties

- 50% of children are likely to be 'testers.' They may initially get worse; give the p/c/t a hard time; test the p/c/t's seriousness (even to the extent that the p/c/t regrets ever implementing the technique!)

False assumption

- P/c/t's often assume that children are 'little adults,' that they are unselfish and reasonable.

Replacing the false assumption

- Childhood has been described as "a period of transitory psychosis." In other words children are basically 'nuts' and it is the p/c/t's job to make them sane!!!
- Children are selfish and unreasonable, they therefore do not understand reasoning (i.e. you should not do...because it hurts me, makes me angry, and it made you feel sad in the end)
- Too much talking is 'water off a ducks back' and is likely to lead to persuasion, frustration, arguing, yelling, hitting etc...
- Think of self as a 'wild animal trainer'!!! ("**little beast**" e.g.)

'Minor Stop' behaviours include arguing, crying, whining, yelling etc...

'Major Stop' behaviours include stealing, swearing, hitting, throwing and breaking things.

Two cardinal rules

Without following these two rules the discipline program will be ineffective

1. NO WORDS

- Translates to 'let's fight'

- Child does not hear the warning/counts in between the verbal 'garbage'
- Takes away child's responsibility for his/her behaviour
- Is likely to lead to the p/c/t begging then to frustration then to arguing etc...

2. NO EMOTION

- The most common emotions are **anger** and **frustration**
- Children normally have an 'inferiority complex;' they are short, less privileged, less powerful, and have little impact on the world.
- 5 yr olds want to be 6 yr olds, 7 yr olds want to be 10 yr olds and 10 year olds want to be you! This is why kids can happily sit for hours throwing rocks into a lake; they are responsible for the big splash!
- When a child sees that s/he has upset you, you become the 'big splash.' The child is likely to revel in his/her power and repeat the behaviour.

N.B. it has been found that in cases that the strategy worked initially then stopped working the p/c/t were not adhering to the two rules in 90% of the cases

How to get kids to listen

- Count **MINOR** 'stop' behaviour
 1. Hold up one finger and say "that's one." Wait for 5 seconds – it only takes 1 second to terminate a tantrum, so this is generous - and if the behaviour or another behaviour continues =
 2. Hold up two fingers and say "that's two." Wait 5 seconds and if the behaviour or another behaviour continues =
 3. Hold up three fingers and say "that's three, take 5"
 4. Once the child returns from 'timeout' nothing is said (no matter how tempting) and all is forgotten until the next 'stop' behaviour occurs and the counting starts again.
 5. The **window of opportunity** can range from 10-45 minutes but 10 or 15 is recommended. This means that if the child performs 3 'stop' behaviours in 10/15 minutes, at that count of 3 the child takes 5. If only 1 or 2 behaviours are performed within this period, after 10/15 minutes the counts start again at 1.
- Count **MAJOR** 'stop' behaviour
 1. If the behaviour in question is deemed to be serious the count can go straight to three (miss 1 and 2) (eg. Swearing or hitting you).
 2. In this case three fingers are held up and the p/c/t says "that's three, take five and an extra 15 because that is serious"
 3. In this case give a clear explanation of, for example, what the words mean and why they should not be used.

N.B the child/ren will get frustrated; this does not mean that you are enforcing the discipline poorly!

When are words/explanations needed?

- In the case of 'major stop' behaviours (eg. swearing and hitting).
- When a new behaviour is performed. In this case the p/c/t holds up 1 finger and says "that's one, we have not been through this before so I'll explain to you why that is 1....." If the same behaviour is repeated later, no explanation is necessary. If the reasons for why the behaviour/s are unacceptable are obvious (i.e. elbowing his sister) an explanation is not needed.
- In the case of sibling rivalry, explanations are seldom necessary.

Can different behaviours be counted in one time period/window of opportunity?

- Yes.

Duration of timeout

- The duration can be based on the child's age (e.g. 2 yr old gets 2 minutes, 10 yr old gets 10 minutes) but a standard 5-10 minutes is recommended.
- If the child continues 'bad' behaviour after the count of three and take five has been given, extra time can be added.
- If the child continues to engage in bad behaviour during the time out period this is not counted. Timeout only begins once the child is behaving. If the child behaves for 2 minutes, for example, then starts misbehaving, the timeout period is started from the beginning.

Where the timeout should be carried out

- Bedroom / Rug / Kitchen stool / Chair at a table / Corner of a room / On the step

N.B. The bedroom is recommended as they are more likely to stay there for the duration

Alternatives to timeout (need to be small things that are punitive = mild punishment)

- Earlier bed time, decrease in allowance/fines, decrease in privileges (e.g. computer or T.V. time)
- With older children (eg 10 yrs) you can give them a choice at 3; say "take five, or have 50 cents off your pocket money this week, or go to bed 15 mins earlier tonight, it's your choice."

Alternatives to using fingers when counting

- Containers and popsicle sticks
- Traffic lights and pegs
- Write down

Can the Counting be shared?

- Yes. Other carers, mother and father, grandparents etc can take turns in counting (e.g. dad; "that's 1" then mum; "that's 2").

What if the child will not go?

- Do not start talking/reasoning/explaining/getting emotional!

- Start moving towards the child (they will usually go). If they still do not move, escort them (pick them up, drag them or carry them) and deposit them in their room/designated timeout place.
- If the child is too heavy/uncontrollable, an alternative (see above) may be given for not complying, in addition to the timeout.

What if the child will not stay in their room/designated timeout place?

- If the child is +5 yrs and comes out before timeout is finished you may start the timeout again or even double it.
- Stay by the door / hold the door shut / put a gate up / install a 'Dutch' door / lock the door
- N.B. the door should only be locked as a last resort. In this case the room should be examined for safety (e.g. no hammers or knives) and windows secured. The p/c/t should stay outside the door for the duration, without letting the child know. The child should only be locked in the room for the specified timeout time, no longer!
- When locking the door is necessary, it is usually found that the child will comply after a few times and locking the door will no longer be necessary.

What to do in the case of 'Room Wreckers'

- Remove all dangerous and valuable articles from the room before implementing timeout.
- Do not tidy it, this gives them ammunition and fun for the next time they wreck it. Simply let them rearrange the mess. They will soon find out that it is more hassle to find their pyjamas, bed, school clothes etc and stop wrecking it. At this point help them tidy the room (do not say anything!).
- If the child urinates, defecates or vomits in the room, clean it and change the timeout spot to the bathroom.

What if the child does not come out of his/her room once s/he is told his/her Time is up?

- Let them be, do not say anything, walk away; they will soon get tired of it (Barricade example).

Can anything be ignored?

- When in doubt count it!
- It is important to give more positive feedback (praise etc...) to children than negative
- After 6 weeks you may want to experiment. Once behaviour has been performed wait a couple of seconds and observe. The child often 'feels' the count coming. This indicates that s/he is capable of terminating negative behaviour on their own (self control) and has started to internalise these values/systems.

Difficult Behaviour in Public

- 1. WHEN OTHER KIDS ARE OVER**
 - 1,2,3 “take five,” 123 “take five,” 123 “play outside” or “go to the other child’s house” (“embarrassing example)
- 2. WHEN ADULTS ARE OVER**
 - 123 as usual
- 3. WHEN GRANDPARENTS ARE OVER**
 - 123 as usual or get them to take turns in the counting
- 4. ON THE PHONE**
 - 123 as usual (merely raising the finger may work)
 - Either tell the other person what you are doing, say excuse me, or tell them you will phone them back
- 5. IN A PUBLIC PLACE**
 - 123 as usual.
 - Do not show the child you are embarrassed
 - Stand still and hold the child’s hand for the timeout period without talking / make them stand in the aisle alone / store bathroom / corner of the store / take them back out to the car / stand outside the store etc...
- 6. DRIVING IN THE CAR**
 - **Short trips;** 123 take five (stop the car)
 - **Long trips;** time 15minute slots, if the child/children are good they will earn 15 cents for each 15 mins, if they are ‘perfect’ for the whole trip will get \$20. You can either both/all earn it or both/all loose it (“**How is you trip going**” example).
 - Once return home resume the normal 123.

Three Common problem Situations

- **Sibling rivalry**
- **Pouting**
- **Tantrums**

SIBLING/CHILD RIVALRY

- Count both children unless there is an obvious, unprovoked aggressor **BUT BE CAREFULL!!!**
- Do not ask what happened or who started it etc...
- Do not assume that the eldest child is more mature; the younger child is likely to use this to their advantage.
- Do not send fighting children to the same room/area.

N.B. Discuss discussions! Count attacks! For example, if the child says “I hate you” or “my teacher is an idiot,” talk about this first and find out the reasons behind this then decide whether discipline is necessary.

Testing/manipulation (the aim is for the child to get their way or to have revenge)

- Badgering *
- Temper/intimidation
- Threat
- Martyrdom *
- Butter-up
- Physical tactics

* Combination is whining

N.B. Pouting (unless it is aggressive pouting) and butter-up are not counted.

- If the child has one favourite tactic this is not good; it indicates that the tactic is working for her/him (i.e. they get their way or continue to engage in the 'bad' behaviour, or the p/c/t gets upset/angry/frustrated).
- If the child starts to switch tactics this is a sign that you are handling the discipline program effectively

What happens if the p/c/t slips up?

- **Short term;** simply say "I'm not doing a good job of this, we are going back to the counting, if you hit three you will get five."
- **Long term;** sit the children down and do the 'start-up' conversation again

How to start

1. PARENTS/CARERS

- Sit the children/child down (preferably with the father/other primary carers) and say that things are going to be different.
- Explain the rules clearly
- Explain that they will like the fact that 'bad' behaviours will not be discussed unless it is something unusual
- Explain that the bad thing is that if they do something really bad (swear or hit) it will be an automatic 3

2. TEACHERS

- In the first week explain the rules to the class.
- In the second week the children tell the teacher what the rules are (eg behaviours that are counted and consequences).
- Explain the discipline to the parents on parent's night.
- Alternatives to timeout may include a letter to parents, going to see the principle etc...