



# Raising Lions “Break” Protocol

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**One-Minute Break.** Whenever your child acts out, whether it be by hitting his sibling, whining, being uncooperative etc., you state in a calm, neutral tone, “It looks like your body needs a one-minute break.”

During this break, your child must sit quietly without talking to or disturbing anyone in any way. There are no toys, books, technology or any other activity allowed during the break. After sitting quietly for one minute, he may return to his previous activity.

The break is taken **wherever the child is in that moment**- he does **NOT** go to his room or the corner or to “time out”- this is **NOT** punitive, it’s simply a matter-of-fact response to an unwanted behavior.

**Example:** Child hits his sibling. Parent immediately states, “Your body needs to take a one-minute break.” Child starts to protest and argue. Parent calmly says, “It’s up to you, but if you aren’t sitting there (point to the spot you have in mind, in the same room), in five seconds, it becomes a three-minute break. It’s up to you.” Parent then counts down from five, “5-4-3-2-1.”

The key is to refrain from engaging in a power struggle. If your child is protesting and asking why he has to take a break, you can say, “If you want to talk about it, we can talk about it after.”

Let’s say at this point, your child goes and sits down but is still verbally protesting and carrying on. You would say, “Your break starts when you are quiet. Let me know when you’re ready.”

You wait until he stops crying/yelling/protesting to start the break. If at any time during the one minute he starts up again, you start the break over.

**Here's the key: your tone is neutral the entire time and you remain cool as a cucumber.**

You can say things like, “I know you are upset. It’s ok to be upset and get your feelings out. The break starts when you're done being upset. Let me know when you're ready.” \*said kindly and empathically\*

A one minute break might actually take 15 minutes! Your child will test you to see how serious you are about the limit. When we implemented this with our older son, H, he was cooperative about sitting down, but he’d do things like stand up in the chair or make a funny noise to see what my reaction was.

If your child does something similar, you can say, “If you get up or talk during the break, it starts over. It’s up to you how long your break is (putting the ball in his court).” The key is to keep an impartial tone, like you have no investment whatsoever in how long the break is.

The idea is to interrupt the behavior and require your child to exercise self-regulation after a moment of impulsivity (hitting, ignoring your request, grabbing a toy etc). You should avoid talking with your child during the break except to give directions or prompts.

Less talk, more action!

If you do a countdown and your child still does not go to the designated spot, you let him know that the break is now three minutes- “You missed the countdown, your break is now three minutes. If you aren’t sitting down by the count of five, you will have a five minute break. It is totally up to you.” Then, begin a second countdown, 5-4-3-2-1.

At this point if your child continues to be noncompliant, you would calmly walk over, take his hand or pick him up, depending on his level of refusal, and walk/carry him over, sit down and hold him.

Let him know that the break will begin when he calms down and is sitting quietly. In more challenging cases, the child might scream, kick, bite, punch etc. (my son has done this!) In this case, you would refrain from saying anything and simply increase your holding pressure, obviously monitoring your pressure so you are not hurting your child.

**Let me be clear: you are NOT being forceful or harming your child.**

You are staying calm and regulated and letting your child know that he's entitled to have his feelings, and that you are there to help his body calm down. **The more calm and regulated you are, the more quickly your child will be able to regulate.**

If you get to this point, you're in it for the long haul and must be committed to holding your child for as long as it takes until he calms down. Once he has, you say, "If you can sit quietly without struggling while I hold you for two minutes, then you can finish the remaining three minutes on your own. When you're quiet, we'll start." Once he's finished the two minutes, you can let go and sit next to him while he finishes the remaining three.

In the first few weeks of implementing this protocol, you might have the urge to compromise the strictness of the break. **However, the more consistent and precise you are, the faster your child will adapt.** Your child is observing everything that's happening and he will seek out the inconsistencies in your behavior in an effort to exploit them and assert control- not because he's manipulative, but because he's a child and it's his job is to seek autonomy and test boundaries!

Though you should be strict in terms of adhering to the steps of the protocol, **the language and tone of voice being used should be empathetic and respectful.**

**You want to be sure you are recognizing your child's autonomy.** You can do this by using phrases such as, "It's up to you, I can't make you do anything," "I'll wait until you are ready," "Let me know when you are ready," "I know it's not fun to be held, but when you run away (bite, kick, hit etc), then I need to hold you," "It's no big deal, you're not in trouble, it's just a one minute break... 5-4-3-2-1.."

### **Important Points:**

- Both parents must be on board and must support one another. Even if you disagree with your spouse when he or she gives a break, do not undermine his decision. You can talk about it later when your kids are not around.
- This protocol hinges on YOUR ability to stay calm and regulated. For tips on how to improve your emotional regulation, [click here](#).
- According to Joe, **the number one mistake he sees parents make is too much talking.** Be direct and prompt and limit the amount of extra communication used. Too much explaining tells our kids that we believe they can't figure out the action and consequences by themselves. This gives them permission to repeat the behavior because you've communicated that you don't believe they know the rules (which they absolutely do!). You don't need to say, "We don't hit," or "We don't grab toys!" Your child already knows!
- In addition to maintaining an empathic, matter-of-fact tone, it's **imperative to remain calm.** Taking a moment to pause instead of react models self-regulation for our kids and communicates so much more than

immediately reprimanding and explaining what your child did wrong. It communicates the expectation that your child can and will navigate through the difficulty and frustration he is experiencing.

- **When your child becomes defiant or oppositional, use language that emphasizes his choices and independence.** For example if he is yelling during the break, you can say, "If you need to yell, you should do that. Let me know when you're done and I'll start your break" or, "I can't make you control yourself, that's your decision. But, I'm going to hold you until your body calms down."
- **The directions and consequences that follow must be 100% consistent, immediate and predictable.** Once you have given a consequence it cannot be reversed. Your child has, most likely, established a pattern of ignoring prompts and challenging the consequences he receives. In order to reverse this pattern, the protocol must be done consistently and without fail.
- Discussion about the break should only be done *afterwards* and does not need to be discussed *unless your child asks*.
- In using this protocol, you are giving your child several opportunities a day to self-regulate which requires use of the prefrontal cortex. The more opportunities your child has to develop his prefrontal cortex, the more successful he will be.
- According to many mental health professionals, one of the most important skills we can teach our children is emotional regulation. Requiring your child to stop and self-regulate when he engages in an impulsive behavior is an effective way to teach emotional regulation.
- **Staying calm and regulated yourself is the best way to model what you are trying to teach.** Often when we're "disciplining" our children, we're being reactive, which models the exact opposite of what we're asking of them. Sometimes we're the ones who end up behaving like a tantruming three-year-old!
- By intervening immediately with a direct consequence (one minute break), you circumvent the build-up of frustration you usually feel when you're continually giving verbal consequences with no results.