

Time-Outs – When and How To Use Them

Time-Outs will help your relationship by preventing hurt feelings, hurt bodies, scared children, and the damaged property that violence almost always brings, but only when used correctly. Time-Outs help your relationship if they are used to avoid talking when the heat is too strong for one of you to talk or listen respectfully, but not used to avoid talking. As you and your partner get better at talking and listening calmly and respectfully, you may never, ever, need to use a Time-Out. Until then, here's the information. Read it over twice and share it with your partner when you're both in a place to listen and learn from one another. Then, when something comes up that causes you to have emotions that are stronger than you're generally able to manage, you're prepared, because you've agreed in advance on one new way to protect each other, your important relationship, your children, your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and your property.

Time-Outs used responsibly will defend your relationship rather than hurt it by avoiding communication. Time-Outs are used to show that you care and respect your partner and your relationship, that you want to work the tough times through, and that you want to do it with strength and focus, in a loving and respectful way that makes your relationship stronger.

When your thoughts, feelings, or behaviors are preventing you from listening to or talking respectfully with your partner, it's a good time to call for a Time-Out.

A Time-Out consists of a few rules:

- 1) Call for a Time-Out that you agreed to in advance. You can just say, "I need a Time-Out." *Most situations are not life and death and do not need an immediate response.*
- 2) Name the time frame for the Time-Out, for example 10 or 30-minutes, or until after the kids are sleeping and each of you is fed and rested. This time frame may need to be negotiated.
- 3) Come back at the time agreed and check in. This is a must. Check in even if one of you is not yet ready to talk. It's ok to re-negotiate the length of the Time-Out again.
- 4) Use the Time-Out to figure out what is important to you, what might be important to your partner, and some possible solutions to the problem.
- 5) When you come back to talk - Breathe and listen. Notice your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, including your facial expressions and body language. Do your best to really allow the communication to happen.
- 6) Don't forget to thank yourself and your partner for talking it through with love and respect.

A Time-Out can be taken anytime, anywhere. At home, it's not always necessary for one of you to leave, but sometimes taking a walk is a good idea. Your partner might feel more secure about taking a Time-Out if you stay around, but don't stay if the situation could become violent. Use your judgment. Please don't drive if you're angry, crying, or upset. Don't use substances during the Time-Out so when you come back later to talk, you're both sober. This is important.

Go and do activities that can release some of the physical tension. Walk, do chores, exercise. Maybe you need to eat, or take long drink from a cool glass of water. Whatever. Just don't dwell on the painful things. A Time-Out is supposed to cool you off, not keep you upset or make things worse. Don't chop wood or hit baseballs or any other activity that could be like practicing or rehearsing violence.

When you come back and check in with each other, and you be the lead to do that, the best thing to do is talk, then, if you can. But, if you can't, take a moment and negotiate another Time-Out. Remember that you both have the right to say, "No, I'm still too upset" and be respected. If you find you truly can't talk about the issue, consider putting it on hold for a longer period of time, or take a few days and writing back and forth to each other on the subject.

You may find that after you've calmed down, you think the issue really wasn't that big of a deal, and you can connect, allow the subject to rest, and move on, forward together.

Don't forget that a Time-Out can also be used with your friends, other family members, and at work. It's also a great thing to teach your children. You'll teach your kids how to manage their emotions. Taking a little time, being patient, and trusting each other to work things out peacefully, as most people will, is a true gift you can give your kids. And, it's your job.

What to do when your partner won't take a Time-Out with you or won't let you leave:

Sometimes, no matter how respectfully you treat your partner when calling a Time-Out, s/he won't negotiate with you and/or won't let you leave. Here's what you do:

- Respectfully remind them of the agreement you made to take Time-Out and why you made it (because you love them, value your relationship, want to give the children a better home, want your kids to avoid repeating your problems when adults, etc.)
- If that doesn't work, and your partner still won't let you leave, **do not touch them**, move them, push them, or threaten them. You will risk an arrest for domestic violence. Instead, ask them if they would rather be the one to leave or sit on the porch so they don't feel like you're leaving or abandoning them.
- If you can, stay and talk with your partner until s/he calms down enough to let you leave. Sit tight, stay put, and breathe. *Tell yourself you can stay calm, breathe, and remember this person is someone you love.* They are worth your staying in control. You are worth your staying in control. Do not allow yourself to indulge the urge to become violent.
- Call a friend, family member, or other person who can come and talk to your partner and calm them down. You'll want this person to support the Time-Out agreement, not undermine it.
- Call 911 and explain that you are concerned about domestic violence happening and s/he is preventing you from leaving. Make it clear to the dispatcher that you are doing everything you can to prevent the situation from becoming violent. Consider doing as the dispatcher instructs.
- Find a safer place like the bathroom or bedroom, and lock the door. Do not come out until you and your partner are calm.
- Get out of the house though the back door or a window, if you can.
- Yell, scream, or shout "9-1-1" and "HELP" so someone else calls 911 or comes to the house to distract your partner from the situation or calms them down.

You can only control yourself. You cannot ever control your partner. Your efforts may help you avoid violence and promote safety, but there is no guarantee that you can ultimately prevent violence if you are the victim. But if you're the person being abusive and controlling you can prevent violence and all of the harmful effects of verbal and physical abuse.

It's as important to signal and agree to a Time-Out as it is to come back promised and really be present and talk with each other. How will you let those previously informed people or person know you'd like to take a Time-Out?

How much time do you think you might need to cool off, look at the situation openly, see what is important to the other, and to you, find mutually agreeable solutions that promote your repair and reconnect - share the energy, and move on? How long will this temporary Time-Out last?

Why do you want to take a Time-Out? What's the benefit to you, to anyone or anything else?

Who are the people, relationships, and property that may be protected if you take a Time-Out?

What do you want the outcome to be? Take a moment to imagine how would you like to see yourself thinking, feeling, and behaving in the future when you take a time out, and when you're thinking it through. _____
