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HOW TO USE A TIME-OUT WHEN ARGUMENTS GET OUT OF CONTROL



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Smart Couples Go Here.

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HOW TO USE A TIME-OUT WHEN ARGUMENTS GET OUT OF CONTROL

Does this sound familiar?

Your partner is on the phone and dinner is ready and the kids are running wild. You glare at your partner and say, "You know, I can use a little help over here."

He/she snaps back, "I just walked through the door and was on the phone with an irate client. Can you cut me some slack here? Stop being such a pain in my butt!"

War breaks out. Dinner is a disaster. Kids' misbehavior adds more fuel to the fire. The two of you end up sleeping in separate beds—again.

This could've been avoided had someone called a time-out.

WHAT A TIME-OUT IS AND IS NOT

Relationships can benefit from a time-out when an argument is getting out of control. When I share this with couples they often reply, "We tried that and it doesn't work." When I ask the "why?" question, the response I often get is, "Well, we go our separate ways and never resolve the argument." This is when I politely inform them, ***"That is not a time-out. It's called withdrawal."***

What a time-out is not

- ⦿ it is not ending an argument abruptly
- ⦿ it is not withdrawing from a partner
- ⦿ it is not controlling the argument or your partner
- ⦿ it is a time limited break in an argument
- ⦿ it is for the purpose of lowering emotional intensity
- ⦿ it is used to maintain mutual respect while working through a conflict

HERE'S MY DEFINITION OF A TIME-OUT.

A time-out is an effective communication tool designed to regulate emotional intensity and maintain respect in an argument.

5 SITUATIONS WHEN A TIME-OUT WILL HELP.

1. When you feel yourself becoming too angry and cannot control it in the moment.
2. When an argument you're having is heating up fast.
3. When the timing of an argument is not suited for discussion.
4. When the argument is already out of control and going nowhere but down.
5. When your partner is amping up on you and it doesn't feel safe or respectful.

HOW TO EXECUTE A TIME-OUT EFFECTIVELY

The time-out allows you to manage your emotional intensity. It helps to maintain respect in the relationship when you're at odds with each other.

Rule #1 – When One Partner Calls For A Time-Out The Other Partner Has To Honor It

- The goal here is to manage the conflict together
- Either you manage your conflict or the conflict manages your relationship
- View the time-out as a friend to your relationship
- Never use the statement – “You need a time-out!”
- Option #1 – I need a time out.
- Option #2 – I think we need a time out.

Rule #2 – Use The Time-Out To Cool Off In Separate Space

- Go to an area where you can cool down
- Do not follow your partner around
- Do not try to dictate or control where your partner goes to cool down.

Rule #3 – Use The Time-Out To Regroup And Gather Your Thoughts

- ⦿ Distract your mind from the argument to allow your emotions to cool down.
- ⦿ Once you have cooled down, think about how to get your point across in a more respectful manner.
- ⦿ Consider what your partner was trying to say.
- ⦿ Think about how you plan to give your partner the respect to be heard.

Rule #4 – The Person Who Calls The Time-Out Is Responsible To Re Engage The Conversation.

- ⦿ Express to your partner that you are ready to talk.
- ⦿ Check in with your partner to see if he/she is ready to talk.
- ⦿ If your partner is not ready then he/she now owns the time-out.
- ⦿ When your partner is ready this person needs to re engage the conversation.

Rule #5 – Agree Together To Give Each Other The Opportunity To Speak Without Interruption And Consideration Of Position Or Opinion.

- ⦿ Paraphrase what your partner says to you
- ⦿ Seek to understand your partner.
- ⦿ Use “I statements” when you express your thoughts and feelings.
- ⦿ Seek points of agreement.
- ⦿ Be flexible with each other in order to find compromise
- ⦿ Admit your faults when you realize you are wrong.

THE SCRIPT FOR THAT COUPLE “IN THE KITCHEN”

The couple in the heated argument would have been well-served by taking a time-out. Arguing while trying to get dinner on the table and dealing with kids' antics is poor timing. Here is how a time-out would be effective.

“LOOK, I CANNOT HANDLE AN ARGUMENT WITH YOU RIGHT NOW. I NEED A TIME-OUT. CAN WE TAKE 5 MINUTES TO CHILL AND TRY COMING TOGETHER AGAIN?”

In Rule #1, the spouse honors the request. Five minutes or so later the spouse who called the time-out informs the other that he/she is ready to talk and asks the other if he/she is ready too. If so, they can defuse the conflict more effectively together.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

So what's your plan for the time-out tool? Use the box below to form your plan of action.

For more on this topic, [listen to the All About We episode](#) where we tackle taking a time-out. Listening with your spouse is even better!

If you found this guide valuable, [share this link with your friends](#). [Tweet about it, too!](#)

