



How to Take a Time-Out

Tool's Objective: To reduce out of control, heated fights that go nowhere. **Credit:** Terry Real, LCSW
Description:

A time-out can be signaled by either partner, when a fight has gotten out of control. This is a “circuit breaker” to end unproductive fights. We use time outs to stop the fight and redirect the energy to repair.

Key Signals to Look For:

- You've stopped listening, you're interrupting each other
- Repeating yourself,
- Heart racing, Feeling flushed, speaking fast, or raising your voice
- Dirty fighting such as name-calling, harsh criticisms, slamming doors, etc.

Step 1: Create a Contract

You agree in advance to call time outs. Agree on a word, phrase, or hand gesture that signals that time-out. Nothing is more important than ending repetitive, non-helpful fights in your relationship.

Step 2: Time-Out Specifics

- The interaction comes to an immediate stop.
- Always taken from an “I” position. For example, “Dear partner, for whatever reason, right or wrong, I am about to lose it. If I keep this up, I will regret what I say or do. I'm taking a break. I'll check back in with you responsibly.”
- When taken from the “I” position, no one can argue with it. *It is a very bad idea to say, “You need a time out.” Speak for yourself.

Step 3: Timing

- Default: 20 minutes is when you need to check in.
- It doesn't mean you need to get physically back together. Some need: 1-2 hours, 1/2 day, and a whole day.

Step 4: Agree to a 24-hour moratorium on what triggered the fight

When you move back into contact, do not discuss the topic that set you off. You can talk about the conflict once it has been over 24 hours.