

## **THE TIME-OUT RULE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

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Often conflicts can escalate to the point where either or both partners become so heated that they are no longer problem-solving, no longer willing to listen and consider the rights, opinions, and feelings of the other person. They feel so threatened that their integrity and self-esteem seem to hinge on winning the argument, having the final say, or having control of the situation and the other person, or preventing the other person from controlling them. At that point there is the potential for very hurtful insults, threats, and destructive action, including physical violence.

THE TIME-OUT RULE IS INVOKED BY EITHER PARTY SAYING THE WORDS "TIME OUT!" Say nothing after "time-out," for example, a sure way to sabotage yourself is to say, "Time-out, you stupid jerk!"

When either person says "TIME OUT" the other person should respond by saying "TIME OUT."

- \* BOTH PARTIES ARE TO SEPARATE PHYSICALLY FOR THE NEXT 15 MINUTES.
- \* There is to be no contact, or minimal possible contact during this time. If possible, both leave the room in which the conflict occurred. No arguments about who gets to go to the living room, and who goes to the bedroom; resolve that one later if you must. For now, just get out of sight and sound of your partner.
- \* If physical separation is impossible, (e.g., in a moving vehicle), keep quiet, avoid any gestures that might provoke your partner, and turn the radio or cassette player off.
- \* If possible, hold all telephone calls or do not answer the phone for the next 15 minutes. If you must talk with others for emergency reasons, do not discuss with them any subject relating to your partner or the argument you just had, (other than to say a time-out is in effect and you cannot discuss the matter now).
- \* Attend to children's needs in the minimal way possible to get the job done. Your main task right now is to cool off and recover from the argument.

AFTER 15 MINUTES HAS ELAPSED EITHER PARTY CAN APPROACH THE OTHER TO RESUME PROBLEM-SOLVING. It is possible that several time-outs may take place over an evening or several days while an issue is being discussed. If no progress occurs, take your problem to a third party mediator friend or therapist.

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