

Relational Life Therapy

10 Commandments of Time Outs



1. USE TIME OUTS AS A CIRCUIT BREAKER

Time outs have one job only: to abruptly stop a psychologically violent or unconstructive interaction between you and your partner.



6. USE CHECK INS AT INTERVALS

It is critical that you check in with your partner from time to time in order to take the emotional temperature between you. The intervals suggested are: an hour, three hours, a half day, a whole day, or an overnight.



2. TAKE YOUR TIME OUT FROM THE "I"

Calling for a time out has everything to do with me and NOTHING to do with you. Calling for a time out means that I don't like how I am feeling and what I am doing or about to do.



7. REMEMBER YOUR GOAL

Whatever point you want to make, whatever the content of the issue, nothing matters more than ending emotionally violent transactions – so keep your priorities straight – nothing takes precedence over a time out.



3. TAKE DISTANCE RESPONSIBLY

Responsible distance taking has two pieces to it: 1) an explanation and 2) a promise of return. "This is why I am seeking distance, and this is when I intend on coming back."



8. RETURN IN GOOD FAITH

You are ready to end a time out when you and your partner are both reseeded enough in your adult selves to have a positive interaction again. Come back when you are truly ready to make peace.



4. SAY THE PHRASE "TIME OUT" OR GESTURE (THE "T" SIGN)

This communicates: "Honey, no matter how you may be feeling or assessing things, I don't like how I'm doing and I don't trust what I am about to do. So, I'm taking some time to regain my composure and I will be back to you when I do."



9. USE A 24-HOUR MORATORIUM

A mistake a lot of couples make when they re-engage is to try to 'process' what just happened. Bad idea. When you come back from a time out just make nice to each other. Give your partner a hug. Wait 24 hours.



5. DON'T LET YOURSELF GET STOPPED

Time outs are a non-negotiable declaration – "I'm leaving." You're not asking permission and you cannot allow yourself to be stopped. Don't call a time out and stand there to keep talking! Leave.



10. KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP & USE IT

If you find that a certain topic ALWAYS triggers a nasty transaction, take that as a signal that you need some outside support in order to have that conversation constructively. Go to a minister or a mental health professional for help.