

Exit & Reentry Checklist

Initiate time-outs when you:

- ☆ begin to feel emotionally overloaded, or sense that your mate is getting overheated.
- ☆ hear yourself or your partner saying the same thing over and over or getting more insistent, and reiteration isn't helping.
- ☆ hear volume or irritation rising in either of your voices.
- ☆ feel any early warning signs of flooding of emotions.



To initiate the time-out:

- ☆ use a prearranged signal. Do not enter into a discussion of whether or not to call a time-out. A hand signal helps you feel protected rather than rejected by the departure. You might want to use a time-out signal from a favorite sport.
- ☆ leave to predesignated places --- a separate room for each of you if you are at home --- without further dialogue.
- ☆ once there, soothe yourself. Do activities you enjoy, or resume normal activities. Reestablish a level emotional state.
- ☆ write in a journal if you like. Clarify for yourself what happened, what the sensitivities were about, and what might be helpful for you to do differently when you discuss this topic again. List the concerns you heard your mate expressing.
- ☆ do not ruminate on what your spouse did wrong or generalize about his or her traits.

When you reengage:

- ☆ wait to reengage until both of you are feeling normal.
- ☆ reengage first in ordinary activities. Discuss the topic again only after you have first experienced a period of normal time together.
- ☆ if you have reengaged before one of you is ready, give the sign and disengage again until both of you are ready.
- ☆ be certain that your plan includes specifications for when you will return to the hot topic with cooler conflict-resolution dialogue.



Exit rules:

- ☆ no door slamming.
- ☆ no parting comments.
- ☆ sooner is better than later.
- ☆ focus on your exit, not on what your partner is doing or saying.
- ☆ never block your mate from leaving, or follow after.
- ☆ remind yourself that this is a temporary disengagement, not a permanent separation. Beware of all-or-nothing thinking.
- ☆ when the going gets hot, keep cool and exit (until ready to reengage --- see above).



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