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Time Outs

The best defense against verbal abuse is a formal time-out.

When either partner calls a **time-out** – by saying the words, “time-out,” by using the “T” hand signal, or by using any agreed upon sign – **the interaction comes to an immediate stop**. The spoken or gestured signal is understood by both partners to be an abbreviation of the following words:

“For whatever reason, right or wrong, I am about to lose it right now. If I stay here and keep this up with you I am liable to do or say something stupid that I know I’m going to regret. Therefore I need to take a break to get a grip on myself and calm down. I will check back in with you once I cool off.”

The default interval for a time-out is 20 minutes. You can specify something else if you like. But if no time is specified, 20 minutes is when you need to check in. Checking in does not necessarily mean you are physically in front of your partner.

You can check in – either in person, by telephone, or by video chat – and tell your partner that you need more time. With each extension, the time-out interval gets longer. The recommended length between check-ins is:

- Twenty minutes
- One or two hours
- Half a day
- A whole day
- Overnight

When reconnecting after a time-out, you must take a 24-hour break from speaking about the subject that triggered the initial fight.

