

COOL DOWNS & TIMEOUTS

We first heard the term “time-outs” from Dr. Anne Ganley who works in a veteran’s medical centre in Tacoma, Washington. Some people call them “cool downs.” A time-out or cool-down is simply a tool you can use to prevent yourself from doing or saying abusive things that you know you’ll regret later.

TOM

“I would reach a point where no matter what I learned in the groups or what the court order said, I just didn’t care. I was going to do something, and nothing could stop me. A cool-down is like preventive medicine. Before you ever get to that place where you don’t care anymore, you leave. The situation won’t change because you left it for a while, but how you deal with it may change totally.”

STEPS TO TAKE

1. Talk to your partner about cool-downs right away. Let him/her know that sometimes when you’re together, it may be necessary for you to take a time-out or cool-down in order to relax. Let him/her know that when you come back, you will agree on a time, either later that day or the next day, to discuss the issue again. She/he might want to do the same thing.
2. Take a time-out or cool-down every time you think your anger is starting to climb. Recognize your physical and emotional cues, and leave the situation (place or person).
3. Do not swear, raise your voice, make threats or use intimidating behavior.
4. Go somewhere and try to relax and think positively about yourself. Remind yourself of what your goals are in the program. It may help to walk, jog or do deep breathing to get some tension out. Do not drive, drink alcohol or take drugs.
5. When you come back, decide with your partner on a good time for discussion of the issue. Maybe it is a good idea to talk it over with a third party present, someone you both trust. Sometimes after a time-out, you may both decide that the issue wasn’t worth discussing in the first place, and you may mutually decide to just drop it. If you decide to discuss the issue and you recognize the cues occurring again—TAKE A TIME-OUT!

Remember these four points about respectful communication and conflict resolution:

1. You have the right to say what you want to say, but you cannot do it in an abusive way. Avoid using intimidating or harsh language.
2. In order for your communication to be effective, both parties must listen to what the other person is saying—not merely try to convince the other of his or her own position.
3. Good communication requires negotiation and compromise. If somebody has to win the argument then somebody else has to lose it, and you’ve lost good communication.
4. No single issue is as important as your overall goal of remaining non-violent and non-abusive in your relationship.