



When you are feeling emotionally escalated to the point you are starting to make poor choices, a time-out can serve as an “emergency brake” to stop yourself before you make any mistakes, including becoming abusive. The goal is to take a time-out *before* you start becoming abusive. Note your internal physical sensations and external behaviors to tell that you are becoming escalated and to take a time-out. A time-out involves the following steps:

Announce it. It is important that you let the people around you know you are taking a time-out. You should keep it brief, since the longer you remain talking the more likely you are to say something inappropriate. You also need to give them an idea of how long you’ll be gone for. Typically you should say something like: “I’m taking a time-out. I’ll be back in half an hour.” A time-out can be as brief as a few minutes or as long as a few hours. Take as long as you need to deescalate yourself. If you don’t feel comfortable calling it a time-out (e.g., at work) you can announce it as a break or going for a walk or going to the bathroom.

Leave the situation. If at all possible, physically remove yourself from the situation, preferably getting out of earshot of the other people. If you remain in the situation you are more likely to get drawn back in before you are ready. If it is not possible to physically leave the situation, then mentally leave--turn your attention inwards and mentally focus on the other time-out steps.

Physically calm yourself. When a person is emotionally escalated higher levels of a natural stimulant, adrenaline, are released into the body. While adrenaline is helpful for physical activities, it can interfere with thinking and speaking clearly. Being physically calmer will make it easier to be more thoughtful in how you respond to others. *Three of the most effective ways of calming oneself are:* **exercise, muscular relaxation, and/or conscious breathing.** **Exercise** should not involve violent behavior such as punching a pillow, boxing or breaking things, all of which can further escalate anger. **Muscular relaxation** involves progressively relaxing muscles in the body, which helps to reduce the level of adrenaline. **Conscious breathing**, which can be done anywhere, involves deepening your breath (so that your abdomen rather than your chest is expanding), slowing your breath, and making it more steady.

Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk. Identify your negative self-talk--the inaccurate or distorted thinking that is escalating you. Once identified, challenge/replace it with positive self-talk--more accurate, calming, encouraging thinking. As you get more perspective and have calmer thoughts you will also calm your body. Refer to the separate hand-out on self-talk for more information about this.

Make a plan. Before returning to the situation figure out how you plan to handle yourself in an appropriate manner. Identify what you might say and do to work through the situation. You might also be prepared for several possibilities.

Return to the situation. You must always return to the situation, if it is possible. A time-out is intended to be a *temporary* departure. The goal is to handle yourself more appropriately--calmer, with a clearer head, and a clearer plan--just as time-outs are used in sports. There may be times when you and the other agree that when you return is not the best time to follow-up. You two can agree to wait until another time, but it is important that you at least check-in with the person at the end of the time-out.

Things that are not time-outs: sleeping, watching television, reading a book, drinking, talking with friends, working on a hobby, or leaving and not returning, to name a few.