

# USING TIME OUTS EFFECTIVELY

## The 4 C's

1. **Clues**- Discuss clues that would signal when a time-out is needed.
  - For instance, if one partner feels a sense of fear, emotionally flooded or wanting to display violence, then a time out is needed.
  - You can talk specifically about times in the past when a time out would have been helpful and plan to use it in similar situations in the future.
  - It may be helpful to have a neutral, non-blaming signal to cue the other person a time out is needed.
2. **Commit**- Commit to take the time out when either person asks for it and set an agreed upon length of time for the timeout.
3. **Cool Down**- Plan to engage in cooling down, self-soothing, or distracting activities during the time out.
  - Typical time out activities include exercising, watching television, writing in a journal IF it can be positive, cooking a meal, taking a soothing bath, or running an errand. This is a crucial part of the time out. □
  - If one person ruminates about the partner or the conflict during the time out then the conflict will only escalate causing further damage to the relationship and you as individuals. □
  - The primary goal of the time out is to decrease emotionally negative “flooding” so you can re-engage about the issue in an effective way.
4. **Come Back**- It’s important to come back together after the time out to debrief, apologize for offenses before the time out, take responsibility for their actions within the conflict, reconcile, agree to disagree if possible or try and make any decisions that are necessary.
  - Typically time outs need to be enough time for physiological flooding to stop (blood pressure come down, heart rate slow, cognitions return to normal), which on average is an hour.

# TIME OUT CONTRACT

During times of conflict escalation, I agree to do the following:

1. Self-Watch: I will pay attention to the changes that occur in my thinking, acting, and feeling that will cue my anger and/or anxiety is entering my danger zone. My cues are:

- Acting: \_\_\_\_\_
- Thinking: \_\_\_\_\_
- Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Signaling: I will at that time, immediately give the agreed upon neutral, non-blaming time out signal.

3. Acknowledging: If my partner signals a time-out I will immediately acknowledge that by calmly returning the signal.

4. Detaching: I will then, immediately and quietly go to my neutral corner and cool down.

5. Returning: I will return to the discussion after the agreed upon time and will apologize for my part in the conflict.

Signatures: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_