

## How to Make “TIME OUT” Work

### What is IPV?



Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a specific form of domestic violence that occurs between two adults and includes verbal, emotional, psychological or sexual harm (including stalking behavior) by a current or former partner. Within the Veteran population, intimate partner violence can occur in couples when stress overwhelms the couples’ existing coping skills. Multiple separations due to deployment, isolation, stress and trauma can contribute to relationship conflict for Veterans and their partners. Patterns of emotional reactions and poor communication skills can turn a small disagreement into a full-blown conflict where people may say or do things they later regret.

Intervention can help couples build healthy communication and intimacy skills, especially when intervention occurs early. The VA has programs that not only address identified IPV behaviors, but also provide opportunities to explore how trauma affects an individual’s ability to connect with others, regulate emotions, and build trust again. Couples counseling and relationship improvement workshops are also available to help strengthen and build healthy relationships. Talk to your Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program Coordinator, Primary Care Social Worker or other provider for more information about programs available at your VA facility and in your community.

In the meantime, if you are experiencing difficulty communicating with your partner or find yourself with a “short fuse” leading to verbal altercations... try using the TIME OUT strategic to regain control.

### What is TIME OUT?

TIME OUT is a tactical strategy to help you control yourself and the situation when conflict arises. Specifically, when you feel yourself becoming irritated or that your buttons have been pushed, you STOP and give yourself a TIME OUT by physically removing yourself from the situation to prevent it from escalating further. However, there is an effective way to do a TIME OUT and an ineffective way.

### What are the steps to a successful TIME OUT?

**1st**– What a TIME OUT is *NOT*. Storming out of the room, getting in the last word, or using it to silence your partner are *NOT* examples of an effective time out. Don’t wait until you are in the heat of an argument to take a TIME OUT.

**2nd** - You and your partner must discuss the use and terms of TIME OUT before you find yourself in the middle of a disagreement. It is a good idea to practice before you need to use a TIME OUT.



➡ Negotiate the terms of your TIME OUT process. This agreement should specify:

- **HOW** either of the partners will initiate the TIME OUT - a gesture or code word so it is clear to the other partner that you are initiating the TIME OUT technique.
- **WHERE** – Where are your “neutral corners”? It can only add to the conflict for partners to wonder where the other has gone and what they are doing during the time out - especially when there is distrust already. Negotiate the approved TIME OUT spaces and or activities.
- **HOW LONG** – Negotiate how long the time out will be (in general). Keep in mind that when one person is ready to talk the other person might not be quite there yet. Don't force the other person to end the TIME OUT if they are not ready to do so. Also, you have heard the expression, “Don't go to sleep angry”. Well that is true for TIME OUTs. Don't let the conflict drag on to the next day. Both you and your partner will dread bringing it back up and the issue will not get resolved. It will just pop up again unexpectedly. So, try to come back together before the day is over - even it is just to “agree to disagree” for now.
- **ENDING THE TIME OUT** – Plan ahead and agree on how you and your partner will end the TIME OUT. When you are ready to talk, approach your partner and ask if they are ready too. Give them some space if they are not but try to negotiate a time to meet back. Make sure there are no frustrations or distractions when you prepare to talk.

**3rd** - Be aware of the warning signs you need a TIME OUT:

- Know your (and your partner's) *buttons*. Be aware of the things that trigger you and your partner to react with high frustration or emotion. We all have these *buttons*, but being aware of them can help you see when you are headed for a conflict and to help you keep from pushing your partner's *buttons*, making the conflict worse.
- Know the signs your body tells you that it is time for a TIME OUT. When you start to feel your muscles tensing, the back of your neck getting hot, racing heartbeat, or elevated voice... your body is trying to tell you that you feel threatened. This is when you must make a choice – stay and fight? or use flight to avoid the conflict? TIME OUT is a strategic third choice that prevents the fight by using flight temporarily to diffuse the conflict in a way that leads to a resolution of the conflict.

**4th**– DURING THE TIME OUT:

- Use this as a time to cool off and calm yourself. Exercise, deep breathing, and meditation can help.
- Ask yourself what is making you so angry, why is it pushing your buttons?
- Think about how you can communicate your needs to your partner in a respectful, loving way.
- Prepare to come back to the conversation open to hearing what you partner needs to say to you, if they are angry then the topic must be important to them too.
- Don't drink or use/misuse drugs during the TIME OUT.



**For additional information or resources:**

For more information, please visit the IPVAP Website at <https://www.socialwork.va.gov/IPV/Index.asp>

The National Domestic Violence Hotline **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)\* Available to callers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. *\*This link will take you outside the VA website. VA is not responsible for the content of the linked site. This link is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute endorsement of the non-VA website or its sponsor.*