

## **10 Commandments of Time Outs** – by [Terry Real](#)

Adapted by Vivian Baruch.

### **1. Use time outs as a circuit breaker**

– A time out is a rip stop; it is the cord you pull to stop a runaway train, a brake, the thing you use to HALT an interaction that either of you has crossed over into, or is quickly crossing over into bad behaviour. Time outs have one job and one job only – to stop abruptly a psychologically violent or unconstructive interaction between you and your partner.

### **2. Take your time out from the “I”**

– Calling for a time out has everything to do with me and NOTHING to do with you. Calling for a time out means that I don’t like how I am feeling, what I am doing or about to do. Whether or not you think you have a problem with how you’re behaving or how “it’s” going between us is strictly your business.

### **3. Take distance responsibly**

– Time outs are a healthy form of distance taking, and like all forms of distance taking there are two ways to do it – provocatively or responsibly. **Responsible distance taking** has two pieces to it: 1) An explanation and 2) A promise of return. “This is why I am seeking distance, and this is when I intend to come back.” **Provocative distance taking**, by contrast, has neither – you just take the distance without any explanation or taking care of your partner’s anxieties about your leaving. Provocative distance taking is incompetent distance taking since it tends to get you chased.

### **4. Use the phrase (time out) or the gesture (the “T” sign) as an abbreviation.**

– There are times when, if you open your mouth to speak, demons will fly out. You may not be able to control that. What is always under your control is the ability to turn heel and leave.

– The phrase “time out” or the T sign as a gesture are abbreviations for the following phrase: “Honey, no matter how you may be feeling or assessing things, I don’t like how I’m doing and I don’t trust what I am about to do. So, I’m taking some time to regain my composure and I will get back to you when I do.”

### **5. Don’t let yourself get stopped**

– Time outs are unilateral. They are your last-ditch effort to avoid immature words or actions. Unlike virtually every other couple’s tool, time outs a non-negotiable declaration – “I’m leaving.” You’re not asking permission and you cannot allow yourself to be stopped. Don’t call a time out and stand there to keep talking! Leave. Leave the room and go into another – a bedroom for example – and close the door.

– If your partner won’t leave you alone, then leave the house – with or without the kids, your call. Go down the block for a cup of coffee. If your partner physically blocks you from leaving, call the police, have them come to help you leave. I have rarely met a couple where the police had to be called more than once.

### **6. Use check-ins at prescribed intervals**

– Since you’re NOT using a time out to punish your partner but rather to calm things down, it is critical that you check in with your partner from time to time in order to take the emotional temperature

between you.

The intervals I suggest are: –

- half an hour
- an hour
- three hours
- a half day
- a whole day
- an overnight– Check-ins can be done in person, by phone or by texting.

## 7. **Remember your goal**

–Time outs are about one thing – stopping in its tracks immature, emotionally violent, destructive behaviour. Stopping such behaviour in your relationship is a goal that supersedes all other goals. You may need to work on better communication, more sharing or negotiation, but none of that will happen until you succeed in stopping nasty transactions totally. Whatever point you want to make, whatever the content of the issue, nothing matters more than ending these sorts of transactions – so keep your priorities straight – nothing takes precedence over a time out.

## 8. **Return in good faith**

– You ready to end a time out when you and your partner are both reseeded enough in your adult selves to have a positive interaction again. Don't return with a grudge or a chip on your shoulder – you'll just start up again. Come back when you are truly ready to make peace.

## 9. **Use a twenty-four-hour moratorium on triggering topics**

–When you re-engage try to "process" what happened. Have a repair conversation, taking responsibility for what you may have contributed to needing to take a time out. Be nice to each other. Give your partner a hug and a cup of tea. If it's a triggering topic, do NOT try to sort through it for twenty four hours.

## 10. **Know when to get help and use it.**

– If you find that a certain topic – kids, sex, money – ALWAYS triggers a nasty transaction, take that as a signal that you need some outside support in order to have a constructive conversation about it. Go to a minister, a mentor or a mental health professional for help. If heated, unhelpful transactions occur with enough regularity that you are frequently resorting to time outs, that's a signal that you and your partner need some ongoing couple's work.

### **When taking a "time-out", ALWAYS self-soothe:**

Compile a list of up to 20 things you can do to calm down/self-soothe when you're distressed e.g. do some [belly breathing](#), make a cup of tea, have a bath/shower, go for a walk, do push-ups, listen to soothing music, play a video game, read a book etc. Keep this list on you e.g. in your phone, so it's with you at all times. This link will give you ideas of [self-soothing items](#).

1. Remind yourself that **your goal is to calm down when you take a time-out.**
2. Take a copy of these instructions with you and read them. Maybe keep them in your wallet/phone at all times.
3. Keep a copy of your calming down/self-soothing list with you & **do** one thing listed.
4. Take responsibility for keeping yourself (& any kids) safe & don't focus on your partner.