

Creating a Marital Timeout

Holes in the wall, screeching tires, clenched fists, and hateful words are just some of the indicators that a relationship has gone awry. Angry words and actions affect lives forever. **How can you stop** these reactions early **before they are out of control?**

Often, the *beginning of healing in a relationship comes by calling a “cease fire”*. While calling this “time out” will not bring healing by itself to your relationship, it will help to **avoid further damage**. I often use the “marital timeout” with couples who are new to therapy and cannot even have a conversation without it escalating out of control.



So how does the timeout work?

Unlike a timeout for a child, **adults put themselves in timeout**. As emotions start to rise, one spouse might say to the other, *“I can tell I am getting angry and need a timeout. Let’s resume this conversation in 20 minutes or in the morning.”* Then, because the timeout has been discussed previously when both parties were calm, **each spouse proceeds to a place to care for their own heart**.

During this time apart, I suggest each spouse go through *The Care Cycle* from the [National Institute of Marriage](#) outlined below.

Disagreements happen because one or both persons are having their “buttons” pushed. I suggest that couples print off The Care Cycle, **move to a quiet place to process**, and then come back to **share what each has learned about themselves**.

Here are a few things to consider when taking a marital timeout:

1. *It is not effective when used for the purpose of withdrawal (avoiding your spouse, alienating yourself without resolution, sulking, or using the silent treatment).*

2. *It must always contain a specific time frame by when the situation will be discussed and resolved.*

If couples **cannot resolve situations within a week or two** by themselves, I encourage them to **see a counselor** for help. Your relationship is too important to let it sustain prolonged damage.

The Care Cycle

**Aware: Create Space*

- Physically remove self from situation
- Internally give self permission to slow down
- Take several minutes in this safe place. Physiologically, you may need 20+ minutes

Goal: *Seek a quiet space for comfort, clarity, and objectivity.*

**Accept: Identify my own feelings*

- What are my emotions, buttons, and fears in this moment?
- View my feelings as information
- Adopt a curious rather than judgmental stance about my feelings

Goal: *Validate and accept emotions, buttons, and fears.*

**Attend: What are my thoughts?*

- Did I do anything to contribute to my feeling?
- Did I play back an old message?
- Do I have memories of broken places?
- Do I have negative beliefs about myself?
- Am I dwelling on negative past experiences?
- Is this feeling deeply familiar? When have I felt it before?
- Am I judging or condemning myself?
- Am I mind reading rather than checking it out?
- Could I have possibly misunderstood?
- Did I get myself all worked up?
- Am I aware of any temptation to soothe/medicate my hurt? (food, substances, shopping)

Goal: *Discover the role you play in the emotional intensity of the situation.*

Allow: *Allow God to Enter

- Ask yourself: What will bring life to this situation? What is the TRUTH?
- What does God say to me (comfort, truth, conviction, value and worth)?
- Allow Him to remind me I am the caretaker of the body/mind He has given me.

Goal: *Between you and God, allow your wants to be met.*

Act: *Choose to respond instead of react

- Will my response create safety within me?
- Will my response create safety for my relationship?
- How does God want me to respond?

Goal: *Behave with honor and integrity.*



Rachelle's passion is to see people live abundant grace-filled lives with an undercurrent of joy, peace, and purpose. She believes relationships should be authentic and connected. Rachelle helps couples and individuals discover the reasons their relationships are unsatisfying and partners with them on the journey of rediscovering health and hope. Rachelle specializes in couples work including affair

recovery, infidelity issues, and sex therapy. With many years of ministry experience as a preacher's kid, pastor's wife, licensed minister, and missionary, Rachelle has a unique perspective into the struggles of ministry families and has a passion to help them live full satisfying lives while working in the Kingdom.

Her education includes an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in professional counseling. Rachelle and her husband have two sons and reside in Nixa, MO.