

Plan a Respectful Pause

Couples communication and boundaries | Couples | 10 to 15 minutes

Agree on a way to stop an escalating discussion and revisit it safely.

Create this plan during a relatively calm moment. A pause gives each person space to regain choice. It should not become a threat, punishment, or demand that someone stay in a conversation they need to leave for safety.

Notice the earlier signals

List the signs you can recognize in yourself before the discussion becomes harder to manage. Examples include speaking faster, losing track of words, or feeling unable to listen. Avoid telling your partner what their body means.

Agree on the practical details

Choose a brief phrase, such as "I need a pause." Identify a realistic check-in time and whether you will speak or send a message. During the pause, choose a settling activity instead of preparing a stronger argument.

Return with consent

At the agreed check-in, ask whether both people can continue. If more time is needed, suggest another time or clinician support. No return agreement overrides someone's immediate safety or right to decline.

My early signals and pause phrase

Where I can pause and what may help

How and when we will check in again

What we will do if continuing is not workable