

THE COUPLES CURE

Miraculous Recovery for Couples on the Brink

Keep Calm Exercise

It's not possible to engage in any kind of productive communication if you are feeling escalated and your heart rate is too high. You will not be able to think clearly, and so any communication from this state is counterproductive.

On the other hand, if you can remain calm you will prevent flooding, unproductive fights or shut-down, or going into fight-or-flight" mode.

The trick is knowing your own baseline heart rate because most people tend to be poor judges of their heart rate. Most people think they are calm when they are not.

Make a commitment to avoid supercharged conversations and monitor your stress level.

How to Monitor Your Level of Stress

- Take your pulse every 5 minutes
- Press your right index and middle fingers against the right carotid artery (that's the one that's two to three inches below your ear lobe just under your jawbone right on your neck)
- Count the number of beats per 15 seconds and multiply by 4 to get your average beats per minute.
- It's good to do this at least three times while sitting comfortably to get your average resting heart rate.
- Any time your heart rate climbs to 10% above your resting rate (8-10 beats per minute) you are over-aroused and you need to take a break. If your resting baseline rate is 80 beats per minute, you're going to want to take a break if you reach 88 beats per minute.
- This seems silly and a little bit forced, but if you both agree to do this, it is extremely helpful. Make a commitment to each other to leave the conversation if just temporarily when one of you gets too upset. Know that it's just a temporary timeout and you're going to come back together soon.
- Most people need 20 minutes to come back to their baseline heart rate even if you think you are fine after 5 minutes.
- During the break, focus on self-soothing thoughts, instead of distress maintaining thoughts.
- Use some relaxation methods to calm down as well.

Examples of Distress Maintaining Thoughts:

- This is ALWAYS how it is and it's never going to change
- I can't forgive that
- That is unacceptable
- Here we go again...
- I'm done - I'm getting out
- I'm not going to take this anymore
- I'm going to get even
- I don't deserve this
- When I go back there, I'm going to just sit there stone faced and wait for them to be done talking
- This makes me so mad

Examples of soothing thoughts are:

- Calm down. Take some deep breaths
- No need to take this personally
- We will get through this when we are both calm
- This really isn't about me
- This is a bad moment but things aren't always like this
- I know I'm upset now but I love this person; Right now I'm angry but this is solvable or we always figure things out.

Relaxation Methods:

- Visualizations
- Deep muscle relaxation
- Running or stretching
- Breathing (if you exhale twice as long as you inhale, that has a very calming effect physiologically)
- Listen to music
- Take a bath
- Do some art

Whatever it is for you, know yourself and what will help you. That way you can press pause on unproductive arguments and come back to the table in a much better place.