



RELATIONSHIPS

Conflict Reset & Repair

What to do when a conversation is getting too heated to be productive—and how to return to it more effectively.

A pause is useful when it protects the conversation, not when it is used to punish, threaten, or avoid returning to the issue.

When escalation starts

1

Name the pattern

Try: "I want to keep talking about this, but I think we're both getting too activated to do it well."

2

Take a real pause

Agree on a specific return time. A pause without a return plan can feel like abandonment or avoidance.

3

Regulate separately

Walk, stretch, shower, ground, breathe if helpful, or write down the one point you most want understood. Do not spend the whole break building your case.

4

Return to one issue

Start with the current problem rather than every related hurt from the relationship.

5

Repair before solving

Acknowledge impact where you can: "I can see why that landed as dismissive." Then move into problem-solving.

Try this repair sequence

"What I meant was _____. I can see that the impact was _____. My part in that was _____. What I want to do differently is _____. What would help you now?"

Use this as a flexible guide, not a rule. If a skill increases distress or does not fit your situation, stop and choose a different approach. Bring questions or observations to therapy.

This handout is educational and is not a substitute for individualized mental health care, medical care, or emergency services. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support.