



TOOL KIT: Initial Steps to Stop Using Abuse in Your Relationship

No Excuses

The first thing you have to do to stop violence and other abuse is to stop making excuses and blaming others. You can't force the other person to change, but you can change yourself. Make a commitment to yourself that you will not be violent, no matter what happens. We all have control over our behaviour no matter how we feel. You can probably think of times when you have been extremely angry but did not react with violence or abuse (for example, perhaps with your boss).

Remember this slogan, "*There is no excuse for abuse*".

Warning Signs

Warning signs are cues that tell you it is time to take positive steps to prevent abuse.

Negative Self-Talk: These are the kinds of things you say to yourself before you use violence or abuse:

- I don't deserve this
- I can't stand this
- I'll show her whose boss

Body Signs: These are cues that let you know you are unable to cope and may resort to violence or abuse:

- Sweating
- Flushed face
- Increased heart rate
- Quickening breathing
- Clenched fists
- Tense posture
- Grim, angry facial expression

Behaviour: This is behaviour that tends to be your first "line of defense":

- Physical - violent actions such as stomping of feet, hitting at objects like the wall, banging the door
- Verbal - talking loudly, shouting, yelling

Situational Cues: Where or when violence happens, and other attributes that are associated with violent behaviour:

- Location of abusive incidents - bedroom, kitchen
- Time of day - evening, late at night
- Repetitive arguments - conflict over discipline of children or money, etc.
- Names or expressions that partners use
- Making negative assumptions about partners - "she's trying to humiliate me" or "she doesn't care about me at all".

Feelings: It helps to list/rank the emotions you feel you have the most trouble with:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Uncertainty
- Depression
- Jealousy
- Hurt feelings

Talking yourself down

You may not realize it, but you make YOURSELF angry. Most anger is caused by what we say to ourselves about the situation, not what happens or what other people do. Just listen to what you say to yourself when you are upset. You may hear yourself blaming, calling people names and threatening. It's called "talking yourself up". You can make yourself so angry that it seems natural to be violent or abusive. Instead, try "talking yourself down" when you get upset. Invent some words that help, like "this isn't worth getting angry about". **When you take a time out, you need to talk yourself down.**

Time out

An important tool is simply to take a time out when you feel yourself getting too angry. It's SIMPLE, but it's not always EASY, so here are some tips:

1. Tell your partner about "time out" BEFORE you use it so she knows why you are leaving and approximately how long your time out will be
2. Recognize your warning signs
3. When you start to feel the symptoms escalating, LEAVE THE SITUATION, immediately, no matter where or when it happens
4. Stay away long enough to cool down, usually about 1 hour, but don't stay away to avoid dealing with conflict, to get even or to punish your partner
5. **Don't drink, do drugs, or drive**
6. Don't talk up—**Talk Down** - calm down. You can also try **relaxation exercises** such as putting your hand on your heart as you breathe deeply and focus on caring thoughts about anything.
7. Try to talk about what upset you when you return but be prepared to leave again if you are escalating. Be prepared to LISTEN.

Your anger is your responsibility. It's not your partner's responsibility to tell you to take a time out, this is something YOU need to do because of YOUR feelings. By taking a time out you are taking responsibility for your feelings and for preventing abusive behaviour. A time out is an emergency measure. It doesn't solve anything. Your relationship will still fall apart if you can't listen to and talk about the issues that are important to your partner. Time outs allow you to regain your self control, and this helps you to be able to hear the other person's point of view. When you come back, describe your feelings by using "I statements" instead of "you statements" which blame the other person. Taking a time out can be a healthy step toward recovery and better communication.