



Today, in a time of peace:

- 1) Agree on a humorous signal either of you can use to ask for a time out. An Italian couple chose as their signal the word “spaghetti.”
- 2) Agree on how long your time outs will last. For us, it’s three hours. *Warning:* be sure to give yourselves enough time to calm down *and* think. Time outs that are too short won’t work.

When you are angry:

- 1) With humor, signal for a time out. *Spaghetti! Spaghetti a la marinara!*
- 2) Agree on a *specific* time when you will talk about the issue. For us, Plan A is to talk exactly three hours later (Plan B is to talk at an even later time if that fits our schedule better).
- 3) Show affection for each other. The person who is angriest should initiate affection. We dance instead of fight, which does an amazing job of reducing the tension between us.

During the time out:

- 1) Calm down. It’s not possible to think clearly until you are calm. I don’t get angry often, but when I do, it takes me one hour to calm down.
- 2) Get to the deeper issue. Ask yourself: why am I so upset about this? *Important:* remind yourself you married a good person, and that your spouse must have a valid point as well. When you see the value in your partner’s perspective, a win-win solution becomes possible.
- 3) Find the right words. Critical thoughts are more effectively expressed in a constructive manner.

At the appointed time:

- 1) Keep your promise to talk at the appointed time. Demonstrate you’ve truly listened to the other’s point-of-view. Gently share a win-win solution. Have a great conversation!

Important points:

There is a wrong way to call a time out. Slamming doors makes things worse. Starting a time out with shared humor and affection sets the tone for a constructive conversation later.

A time out is from the issue, not the relationship. A time out called with humor and affection makes it possible for us to stay in the same room — and to talk about other topics.

Our first time outs were filled with tension. By always keeping our promise to talk at the appointed time, we came to trust the system. Since then, time outs have been easy to call.