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Stages of Marital Crisis Recovery

I Damage Control The initial task is to establish mechanisms for preventing further arguments. The assumption is that people who love each other should never deliberately say or do things to inflict pain and suffering on each other. There are few conflicts which need to be resolved so urgently that disregarding the principle of damage control is warranted. Conflict resolution can only be effectively approached when damage control mechanisms have proven to be reliable. I cannot emphasize this too strongly. Conflict resolution must never take precedence over damage control. As with the Hippocratic oath taken by physicians, the first and most important issue is "To do no harm." Taking time-outs is the central technique but considerable preparation is necessary for this to work effectively.

1) Time-out: As soon as you start getting in a bad mood say, "I need a time-out. I'll be back in ten minutes." Leave without making any further comments. Stay gone for ten minutes. Be back on time.

2) Back-up time-out: If you notice that your spouse is getting in a bad mood then say, "I need a time-out. I'll be back in ten minutes." Leave without making any further comments. Stay gone for ten minutes. Be back on time.

3) Practice time-outs / Practice Arguments: When there is no tension start a bogus argument about the weather. Then say, "I need a time-out. I'll be back in ten minutes." Leave the room just for a second and come back and carry on. Both parties should do two or three practice arguments and time-outs every day preferably when you are together.

4) Time-outs Score Card: Use this table to tally instances of taking time-outs, back-up time-outs and practice arguments time-outs.

II Reestablish the expectation that you can enjoy pleasant times together. Make a written list of things you can enjoy doing together. Get in the habit of picking something from the list every day and doing it together.

III Start being affectionate again. Again, make a list of things that you have done in the past to be affectionate. Start with the small signs and work up from there.

IV Conflict Resolution. Only when the first three stages are complete is it likely to be productive to discuss notably difficult issues. Don't attempt to resolve a conflict unless you are certain it won't turn into an argument. Damage control is primary.