



SLOWING IT DOWN

Do we need a pause, a break, or a recess? Or should we table this discussion for a later day or with a third party?

Creating Understanding: The Why

Before you knew of the neurodiversity in your marriage, you have probably established unhealthy communication patterns. We need to slow things down, break up conflict into smaller pieces, and acquire new skills and space and grace to practice them.

THIS IS A SLOW PROCESS!

There is an assumption that you each are doing your own work to regulate, calm down, return to joy or peace, process your big emotions (sadness, anger, despair/depression, shame, anxiety/fear and disgust or what has been called the big 6 emotions).

RESOURCES



Polyvagal Chart (Fight, Flight Freeze Diagram/ Red, Yellow or Green Zones)



Wheel of feelings or mood meter

New Learning & Understanding

Fact about Autism/Asperger's: one of the features is **ALEXITHYMIA**. Alexithymia is part of AS—a brain communication issue, not willful noncompliance.

- **A-** without
- **Lex-** the word
- **Thymia-** feeling

This lack of feeling and words for feeling can be painful to the non-AS spouse and cause feelings of distress, which may lead to shut down or escalation from the spouse. It can appear to the non-AS spouse that the AS spouse is flat, not feeling, not caring, and is hurtful.

So, in the moment, the feeling is being felt. Without the word for the feeling, it appears to either be angry or happy, but the vocabulary is simply missing on naming and describing. So, the second suggested tool to **better name feelings** in the moment, which may look like the extremes of anger or happy with a flat neutral base if neither is present.

Guidelines

Once you see the Polyvagal Chart, this may make more sense, but we want to create a phrase that does not already have meaning: perhaps "we are not in the green zone," or "green zone," or you can simply say, "Let's pause," or, "I need a pause," or, "Feels like the red zone."

If you call *pause* or *break*, you can use maybe use those above. **BUT** we do not want to say, "Calling a pause, you are shutting down," or, "Calling a pause, you are escalating." These will further escalations.

Instead, try, "I need a pause," or, "We don't feel like we are in the green zone," or, "I am not in the green zone, let's pause." Any of these work to call a pause. Or, it could simply be posed as a question: "Are we in green?" or, "I think we need a pause; it doesn't feel like the green zone." And this code green is kind of the cautionary expression that the next thing will be a pause.

So, the three levels are **pause, break, table**—then save it for counseling.

Scenario: We are having a discussion, and someone feels escalated or shut down or senses the other person has had a mood shift. One can use the phrase above and call for a **PAUSE**, and the other **MUST** keep the boundary and not ask why or press to keep talking. This is a hard boundary.

Be careful not to use the tool as a weapon to shut the other person off so that one person can get a point in then pause. That would be a misuse and out of bounds. We do not cause pauses to shut down the other person.

PAUSE

- Any person can ask for a pause
- If person 1 calls for a pause:
 - Bio break/get water—quick tasks OK
 - Also, let's not text (others) or reach out or try to talk. It's a hard pause—don't be tempted to try and engage by text, etc.
- The person who called the pause can ask the other, "Are we in green?" or, "I don't feel ready; let's go to break." **THE PERSON WHO CALLS PAUSE INITIALLY MAKES THE CALL.**
- It is best if no screens/checking phones
 - No distractions
 - Just a time to decompress and take a breath, sing, pray and get back to "green" if possible
- Return to peace—calming or decompression strategies
- Then, try again

Break

- 10-15 minutes (attempt 2 at trying to handle a disagreement)
- Use a timer if needed, not the phone
- Whoever says they need the break, say, "I need a break; let's meet back at..." (in 10, 15, or 20 minutes). Be intentional this time to decompress personally. Some couples may do this and then start the time with prayer.

- What **not** to do in this break time:
 - Again, no screens
 - This is maybe more than take a deep breath; everyone needs to decompress and come down a level.
 - Still, no screens, phone, email, work—these could trigger something. Or, someone could get upset and have to stop and go back and talk, so I find screens or work is not a good decompressor.
 - No smoking, no alcohol, no chemicals, no pot
 - Do not continue the argument in text messages
- What you **can** do during the break:
 - Walking the dogs/time with pets is okay
 - Read a book for a few moments/Scripture meditation
 - Rest the eyes
 - Sit in a favorite chair
 - Take a walk
 - Exercise/ do some cardio to release the pent-up energy or frustration
 - Shower/bathe
 - Snack
- All of these are okay things to do—the main thing is not to use the time to get back to a task. The goal is decompression and getting back to green and try the discussion again.
- At the end of the break, meet at the designated spot. Come back and try again to discuss the matter after the break.
- If it goes south again: **RECESS**



Recess

- RECESS IS A SEPARATE SPACE IMMEDIATELY—keep space and stop further communication on this topic today.
- Table the Topic
 - The topic is tabled. Establish a time in the next 3-5 days if possible to reengage on this topic without introducing new issues.
- It is up to you individually to come to the "table" regulated.
- Perhaps journal or write up where are we stuck? Where do we agree? Use space provided on the final page.
 - What is being missed?
 - How do you want to handle a tabled topic?
- Wait a day, set a designated day like Saturday, try again. Try coming back and trying the conversation again in a non-triggered state
- Try this a few times. If escalation occurs, prepare recordings and consult a professional.



ZERO Domestic Abuse Tolerance

- We may need a safety plan and separation policies.
- Domestic Abuse Defined:
 - If physical or verbal violence occurs separated for 24-48 hours and physical separation needs to be discussed for a longer period of time

- **Defined by Department of Justice:** Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological actions or threats of actions or other patterns of coercive behavior that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.

Further Notes

I am sure this raises questions, but these "Fair Fighting" rules can help us put those parentheses on conflict and work toward resolution.

Please let me know if the other person is not following these "guidelines." Please email me if the other is not following the guidelines and don't call the other out on it—do not be the rule police with your partner.

There is rarely a good reason to have any relational discussion after 10 p.m. about anything that could possibly be sensitive or in disagreement. There is no talking or trying to resolve issues mid-night during sleep hours of 10 p.m.-7 a.m. for most people.

Driving is usually not a good time to have an emotional or heavy conversation, especially if kids or others are in the vehicle.

Journaling

What is happening for me? Where are we stuck? Why am I being triggered?

Where do I feel misheard? What do we agree on and disagree on?

[illegible]

[illegible]