



Learning to Pause, Regulate & Re-Engage

A 7-step guide for handling big feelings & tough conversations
in your relationship

Purpose: To learn what to do when emotions run high during conflict

How To Use This Worksheet:

Think of this sheet as a skill-building guide.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Take a deep breath, and go through the sheet step by step.

Be honest about what comes up when you go through the steps.

You can either type/write/mark your responses, or think out loud.

Having a printed sheet in your hand usually helps.

Keep practicing. Change takes time, effort and patience.

This guide teaches you

- How to notice early signs of dysregulation
- How to pause a conversation without causing damage
- How to regulate your body first before trying to communicate
- How to softly return to the conversation you paused

1) How do I know if my system is getting dysregulated?

Tick, write or say whatever fits

- There's a pit in my stomach
- My hands feel tingly
- My chest feels heavy
- I'm feeling hot, shaky, restless
- My heart is racing
- My voice is rising
- It feels like I just HAVE to prove my point
- I want to disappear, shut down, or just end the conversation
- _____

Why this helps: Catching signs of dysregulation early lets you pause *before* the fight explodes. Once your nervous system is highly activated, effective communication becomes a whole lot harder.

2) What is my usual reaction when things heat up?

Tick, write or say whatever fits

- I become sharp/angry/controlling/aggressive/a blamer
- I give in/end the conversation/avoid the topic/act like nothing happened/say it's not a big deal
- I feel numb/blank/disconnected
- _____

Are these reactions helpful all the time?

Why this helps: These are your current automatic reactions. Becoming aware of these patterns opens up options for you to pause and respond differently.

3) How can I **pause** the conversation without coming off as inconsiderate?

Pick or modify any

- I care about this, but I need a few minutes to cool off.
- I don't want to say something hurtful. Let's take a timeout?
- Can we take a short break and come back to this?
- _____

Why this helps: Expressing a clear intent to come back to the discussion helps the other person see that they're not being abandoned. Pausing gives you the time to pull yourself together.

4) How do I **regulate** myself first?

Try any that feel doable

- Splash cold water on face
- Breathe slowly, deeply [inhale 4 secs, exhale 8 secs]
- Stretch your body
- Step outside, walk around in open air
- Have a cup of tea
- _____

Why this helps: It's much harder to think clearly when your system is overloaded. You have to regulate and soothe your body first to access the thinking part of your brain.

5) What am I actually feeling underneath my reaction?

Tick/write/say anything that feels true

- Hurt
- Rejected
- Abandoned
- Scared
- Powerless
- Unseen or unheard
- Ignored
-

Why this helps: Big or automatic reactions like blaming, shutting down, rising voices usually come from trying to protect softer feelings. When you and your partner get to know each other's underlying softer feelings, it lowers defensiveness and prevents fights from escalating.

6) What kind of support do I need to be able to come back to the discussion later?

Tick, write or say whatever fits

- Self regulation: *I need some space, some time alone*
- Coregulation: *I need a gentle presence, a soft voice, or a hug*

Ask for the support you need. Try to provide the support your partner needs.

Why this helps: Asking directly for what you need helps prevent insecurities or doubts from worsening.

7) How can I **re-engage** after regaining my composure?

Pick or adapt from any

- I feel steadier now. Can we talk?
- I realized I wasn't thinking clearly. I want to understand what you meant by _____
- What I was really feeling was _____
- This is difficult for me. Can you help me understand what you meant?

Why this helps: By attempting to understand what the other person is trying to say, you learn the *other side* of the story instead of running with the version *your own mind* created. It teaches both you and your partner that conflict is manageable, not dangerous.

Remember

We don't build strong relationships by winning or shutting out arguments
We build them by coming back to the table calmly, openly, honestly

Want to work on this on a deeper level?

[Consult a therapist online](#)