

# 7 Steps for using a Pause to end a fight!

TOOLS TO MAP AND NAVIGATE YOUR LIFE JOURNEY



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**Tired of having that  
Same Old Fight?**

**Here's a Practical  
Guide to changing  
your conflict style.**

**Learn how to use a  
Pause to end a fight!**

# Step 1: Recognize that you're activated & call for a Pause.



## Activation

We call it *being activated*, when you start feeling worked up during a conflict. Here are some typical signs of activation:

- The words *always* and *never* appear
- The basic theme becomes: "You're wrong and I'm right!"
- Blame, name-calling and judgment are communicated.
- You're each telling the other who they are, what they're thinking and the true meaning of their actions.
- Defenses are engaged, which are some version of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn.

## Calling for a Pause

When you realize that you're being swept up into the Same Old Fight, say, "I need to take a Pause. I'm too activated to keep this up." Here are some guidelines we suggest for taking a Pause:

- If one person asks for a Pause, the other will agree.
- Whoever calls the Pause is responsible for initiating a return to talking.
- Whoever calls the Pause will give an estimate of how long they need.

# Questions:

1. Where do you first feel the activation? Shoulders? Stomach? Jaw? Chest? Face?
2. Would you describe your first reaction as fight, flight, freeze or fawn?
3. How would you describe the pattern of activation in your childhood family?

# Your responses:

1.

2.

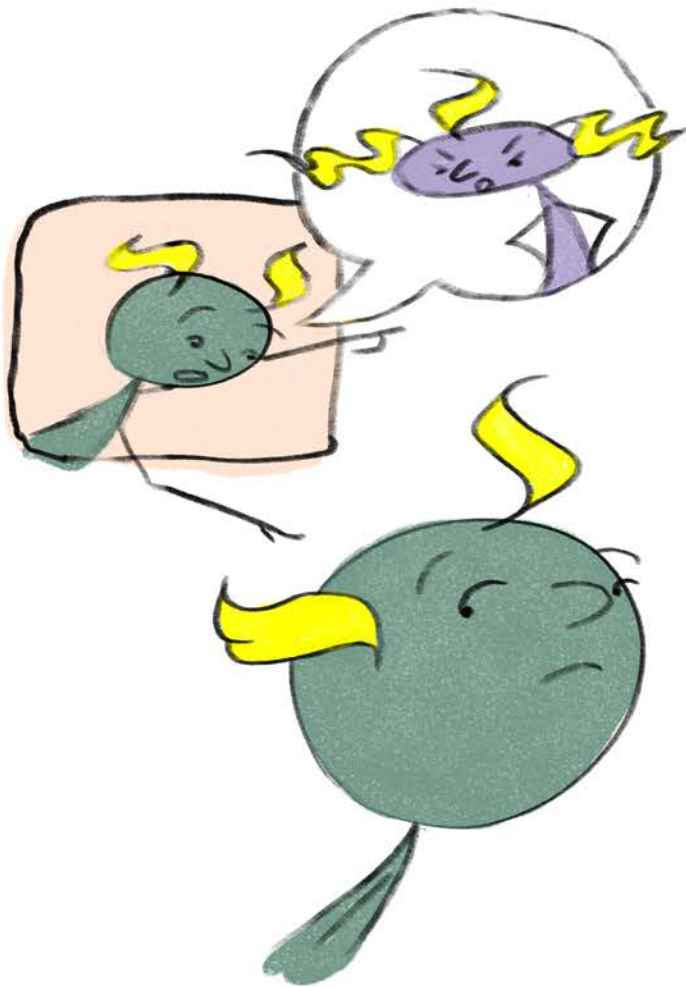
3.

"Anger is a short  
madness."

-Horace

# Step 2: Listen to the Story in your own head.

## Listen to the Story & write it down



Immediately after calling a Pause is the best time to tune into the talk show in your head featuring “All blame--all the time!”

Transcribe your thoughts. Literally. Find a piece of paper, or open your phone or laptop and write what you hear.

It's probably something like:



He just ignores me and everything I say. I feel invisible. He thinks magic elves do the work around here. He has no idea about all I do! I'm just expected to do it and if I say anything, he says I'm nagging! I feel like the parent trying to get a child to take some responsibility and do his share. And if he doesn't like what I'm saying, he just pouts and gives me the silent treatment.



She can't stop nagging. I do more than my fair share around here, none of which is ever appreciated. Just because she thinks something is important doesn't mean it is. I have my own priorities, but they're never considered. And then I'm the one who's called inconsiderate! Who put her in charge of setting everybody's schedule for chores?

## Believe it or not, this is gold!

Writing down your Story will help you gather important information that you can use to end the fight. You may find a little bit of relief by putting it into words. And you've engaged the observing part of your brain, which you'll need for the next few steps.

# Questions:

1. What is the story that's going through your activated mind?
2. What stories have you told others about conflicts you have had in the past?
3. Is there a common theme to those stories?

# Your responses:

1.

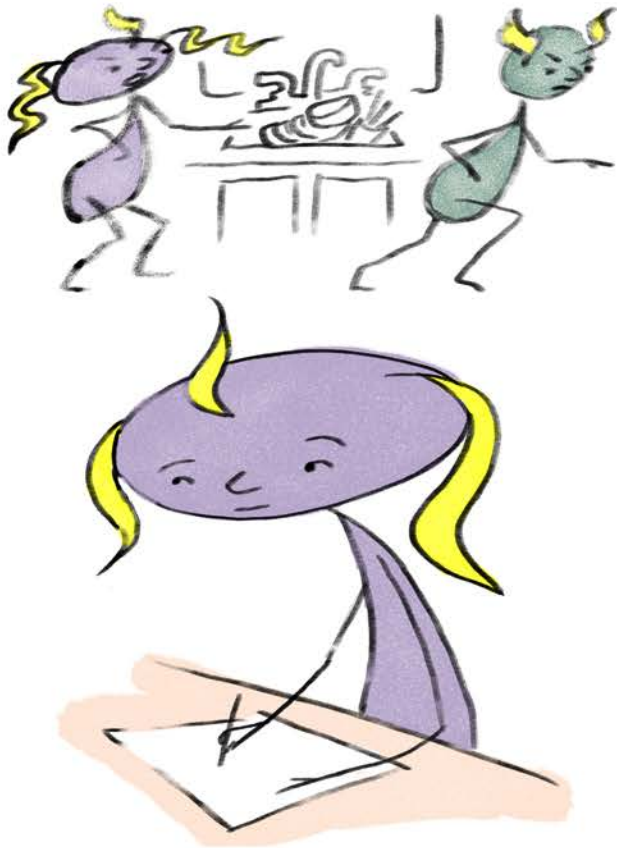
2.

3.

"Revenge and retaliation always perpetuate the cycle of anger, fear, and violence."

Coretta Scott King

# Step 3: Describe the actions of the Activating Event



## Description, not blame

Our natural response to discomfort is to blame. But blame acts like kerosene when applied to the fire of activation. What we're interested in is a description of what happened.

An alternative to assigning fault and blaming is simply to describe what happened, as if you had watched it on TV. Better still, as if you were a Martian watching it on TV with no idea about the *meaning* of the actions.

Like different characters in a novel, each of you will naturally have your own starting point for the account and will remember different details.



I picked his underwear and towel off the bathroom floor and put them in the hamper.  
I went into the kitchen and saw dishes in the sink and said, "Who is going to do these dishes?"  
He rolled his eyes and left the kitchen.  
I called to him as he left the room and said, "Are you going to do the dishes before supper?"  
I followed him into the living room where he was looking at his laptop and said, "We need to talk about this!"  
He kept looking at his laptop, and I closed it and said, "Don't you dare ignore me!"  
He stood up and came very close and said, "Stop nagging!"  
I suggested we take a pause. I said I needed 20 minutes to cool down.



I was working on a spreadsheet for our finances.  
I went into the kitchen.  
She put her hands on her hips and said, "When are you going to do these dishes?"  
I got a glass of water and left the kitchen.  
She called out, "You need to do them before supper!"  
I opened my laptop and she came into the living room and said in a loud voice, "We need to talk about this!"  
I didn't say anything and kept looking at my laptop.  
She slammed down the lid of my laptop and said, "Don't you dare ignore me!"  
I stood up and said in a loud voice, "Stop nagging!"  
She asked for a 20-minute Pause.  
I agreed and went for a walk.

# Questions:

1. Describe as if you were a Martian the actions of the two human critters (you). Include facial expressions, gestures and volume of voice.
2. Describe, without interpretation or judgment, your own physical sensations.
3. What do you tend to notice more, what you saw, what you heard, or what you were physically experiencing?

# Your responses:

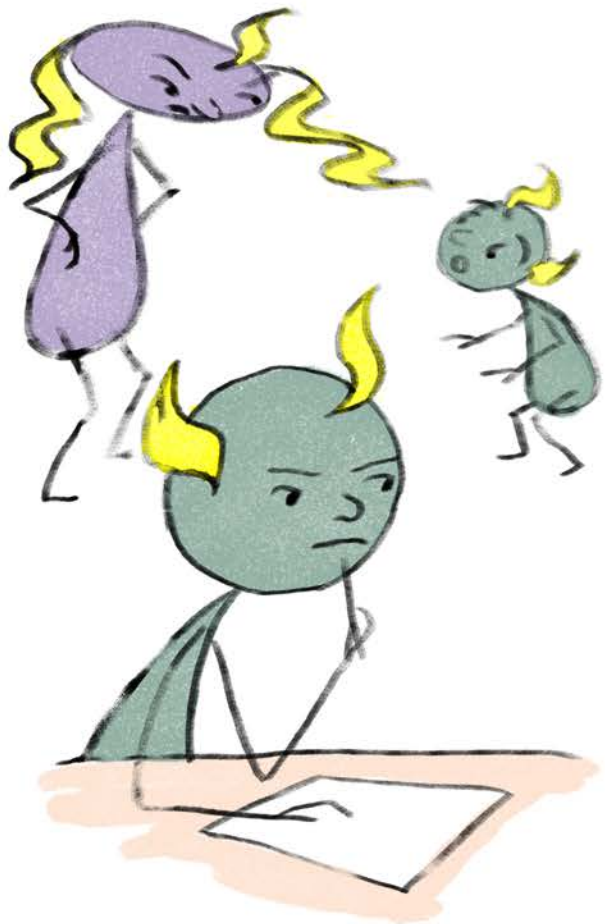
1.

2.

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"The opposite of anger is not calmness, it's empathy."  
Mehtmet Oz

# Step 4: Identify your pain points



## Pain Points

Using the information you gathered in Steps 1 & 2, identify your pain points. What were the words, gestures, tones and actions that dialed up your activation? They usually connect to a previous painful experience involving criticism, threat, abandonment or disregard.

What did the pain points you identify mean to you?

In our example, here are some pain points:



The clothes and towel on the bathroom floor and the dishes in the sink meant I was in the subservient role. They meant that my needs are always disregarded and easily ignored. The rolling eyes signalled ridicule. This meant that he considers my words as laughable and can be easily brushed aside. When he left the room and continued to ignore me, I felt it as a threat: "If you don't act the way I want and keep making demands, then I will leave."



Facing finances all by myself means that it's all up to me to carry the weight of these crucial matters that I'd rather not face. It also means that I'm not appreciated. The hands on the hips meant she was talking to me like she was a parent or a teacher, and I was the naughty child about to be punished. Her raised voice and grimacing face left me feeling like I was being sprayed with blame. When she slammed my laptop shut, I felt attacked and challenged to fight.



# Questions:

For each of the pain points:

1. Identify what you believed about yourself.
2. Identify what you believed about the other person.
3. Identify what you believe about life in general.

# Your responses:

1.

2.

3.

*"Anger is like a storm rising up from the bottom of your consciousness. When you feel it coming, turn your focus to your breath." -Thich Nhat Hanh*

# Step 5: Look for associations to your pain points



-Picking up the clothes and towels reminds me of how I was expected as a child to scrub the bathroom, wash dishes and clean the cat litter, but my brothers just had to take out the garbage once a week.  
-My father left us when I was ten. He used to ignore my mother's complaints and roll his eyes at her suggestions. Then one day he left altogether. He blamed my mother. I did too. She was just supposed to shut up and take it. Or else.  
-I had a "best friend" who got mad at me for a silly mistake I made. She gave me the silent treatment for an entire year. I was so miserable and alone!

## Associations

Focus on your experience of the identified pain points (not what the other person was doing, but on how you experienced them). What are the emotions? the physical sensations? the beliefs about yourself?

Then let your mind drift back to an earlier time in your life, perhaps in adolescence or childhood, when you had a similar set of emotions and responses.

What memories emerge?



-My second grade teacher always put her hands on her hips when she was about to shame me in front of the class. She really had it in for me. She would tell the class what I had done and then ask the class why what I had done was wrong.  
-I used to be bullied by some of the other kids and teased for being chubby and other stuff. They used to follow me, and I just wanted to go away and hide.  
-My parents used to fight, and it would get loud and scary. I would hide in my room and put a pillow over my ears.

# Questions:

1. What memories emerge as you feel the physical sensations and say or think the beliefs you had about yourself, the other person or life in general?
2. Is there a time in your life when many of the pain point associations happened?
3. Are there stories about what happened to someone else among your pain point associations?

# Your responses:

1.

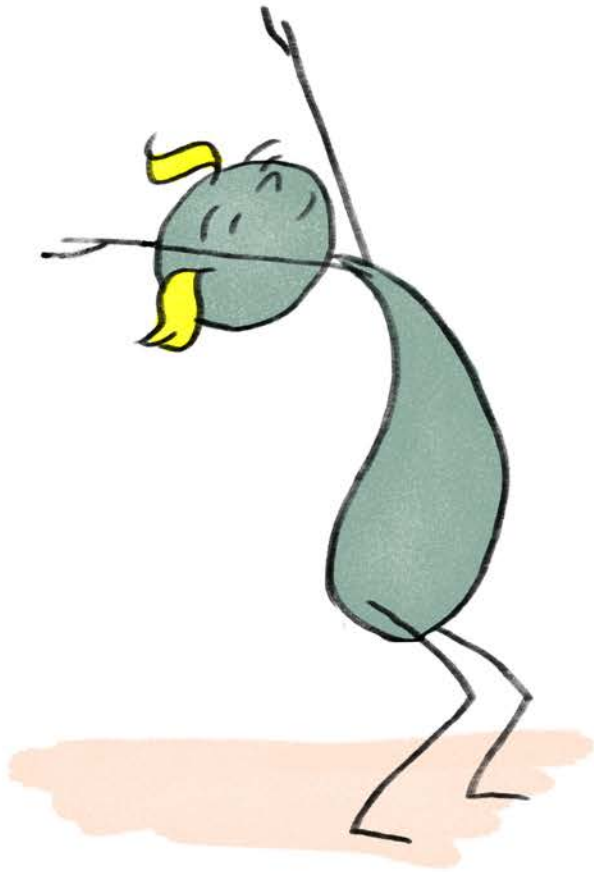
2.

3.

*"Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured." - Mark Twain*

# Step 6: Relax and get grounded

## Breathe!



You've done a lot of hard work! Now take a few minutes to relax your mind and your muscles. Start with a few minutes of deep, abdominal breathing, focusing your attention on your breath as it comes in and as it goes out. Breathe in compassion for your vulnerable self, and breathe out tension and pain.

You can also ground yourself in the here and now by having a cold or hot drink (non-alcoholic!) or by doing some yoga or stretching.



- Created a ritual of a simple yoga stretch and did some deep breathing.
- Held a small, special stone that connected me to a sense of peace.
- Made some hot tea and sipped it slowly and mindfully.



- Took a walk around the block a few times, paying attention to my breathing and also the air temperature, the sounds of the neighborhood, and the feel of my feet connecting with the sidewalk.
- Held a glass of icewater against my forehead and then sipped it slowly and mindfully.

# Questions:

1. What ways have you found that help you center and relax?
2. Were there places you went or things you did that helped you calm down as a child or adolescent?
3. Are there relaxation techniques you are interested in but have never tried?

# Your responses:

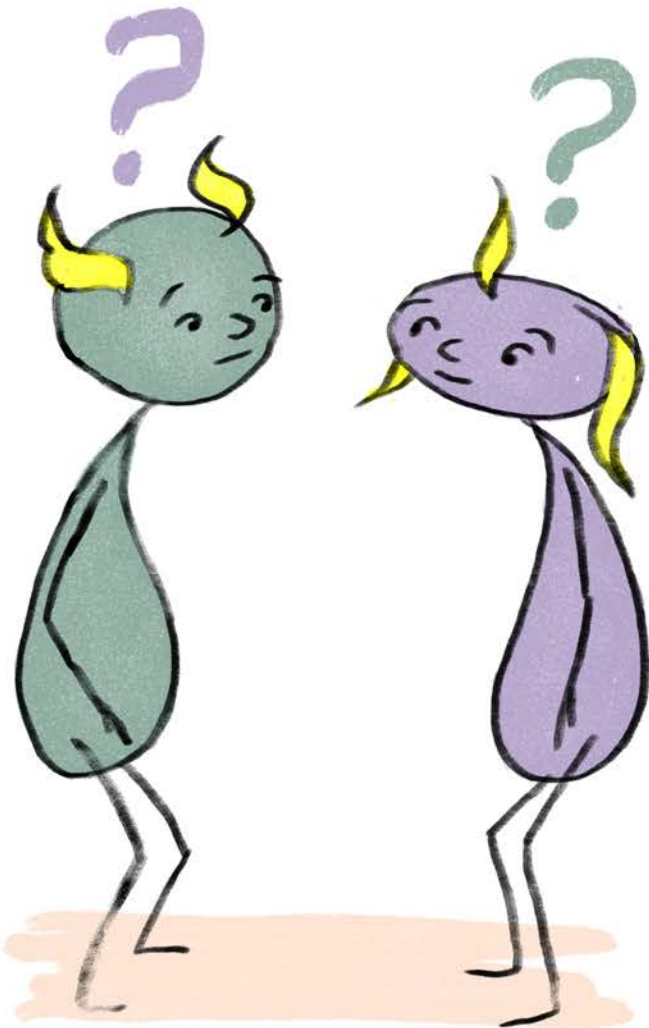
1.

2.

3.

*"We boil at different degrees."  
- Clint Eastwood*

# Step 7: Get in touch with your curiosity



## What was your partner's experience of the conflict?

You are now ready to share what you discovered about your own experience, and if your partner has agreed to “use the Pause” along with you, they’re also ready to share what they’ve learned with you. So it’s useful, in the moments before you return to a conversation, to remind yourself that you have no direct access to the other person’s inner movie.

Open your mind with curiosity and be prepared to learn something new. The more you make an effort to understand their point of view, the more they will be willing to do the hard work of letting go of their story so they can understand what it was like for you.



-I held the image of him looking like a scared little boy. I could identify with feeling like a scared little girl.  
-I remembered stories he’d told about being bullied, and I felt my heart opening.



-I remembered her telling about what it was like when her father left. I felt compassion and wanted to protect her.  
-I pictured the little girl having to do so much more work than her brothers. It didn’t seem fair.

# Questions:

Describe three things, specific or general, you have learned from the activation experience and that you would like to share with your partner.

## Your responses:

1.

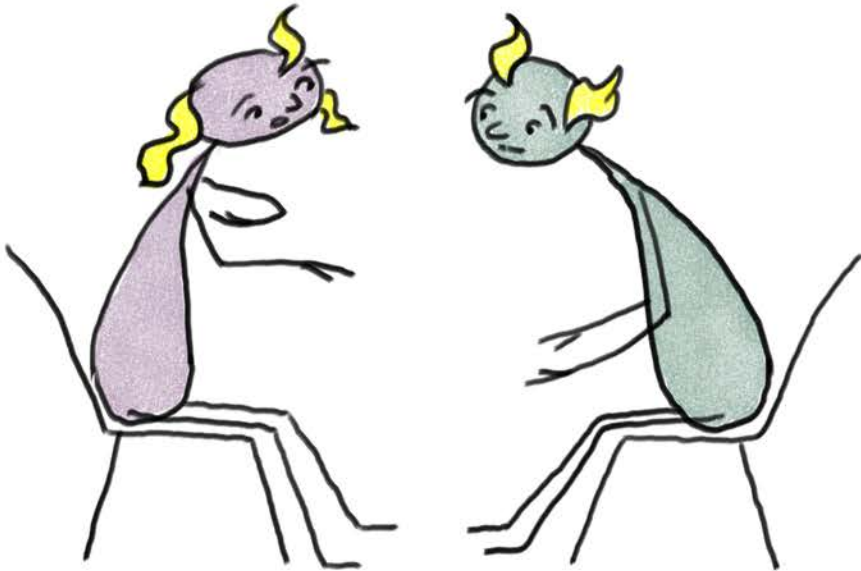
2.

3.

*"For every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty seconds of peace of mind."  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

# What next?

# After the Pause ...



## You've learned a lot

You've used the Pause to learn a lot about what happened during the fight. But now you're ready to turn the destructive fight into constructive conflict. Share what you've each learned, taking responsibility for your actions and your reactions.

Speak kindly and listen with curiosity and compassion to what your partner is saying about his or her experience. You are two vulnerable people who want to feel safe, loved and appreciated.

Feel the connection of that mutual desire.

You may still need to negotiate about when chores get done and who does them, but now you know where the land mines are.



-I understand why it's so activating for you when I put my hands on my hips when I'm angry. When I have a request to make, I'll ask you when would be a good time to discuss it.  
-I want to speak with you in an adult-to-adult way, not like a parent to a child.  
-I also have a better understanding of how you experience my need to talk things through. It's so different from the way I'm experiencing it!



-I finally understand why you get so upset when I leave the room and get quiet. To me, it feels like refusing to fight, but to you it feels like I'm never coming back.  
-I would appreciate having adult-to-adult conversations, and when you ask to discuss something, I'll take it seriously.  
-I know that putting your hands on your hips is just a habit. I'll take responsibility for my reactions to it.



# Questions:

1. Which step for using a Pause do you find most challenging?
2. Which steps come most naturally to you?
3. What did you learn that was unexpected?

## Your responses:

1.

2.

3.

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."  
- Aristotle