

## THE PAUSE BUTTON: Taking a break while maintaining connection

### HALTS for all ages

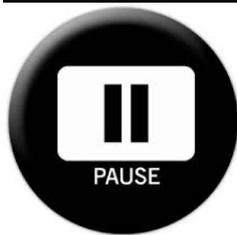
Camp counselors, and others who work with children and teenagers, often use the acronym HALT as a reminder of how to respond to conflict and strong emotions. If the children or teens are **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, **T**ired, the counselor will give attention to those factors before trying to resolve the conflict. I add **S**ick/**S**tressed to make the acronym **H.A.L.T.S.**



We can benefit from carrying out a similar check: is food, rest, physical healing, safe driving, or some other need more important than communication at this moment? If so, attend to that need before attempting to communicate.

If you're already hungry, tired, stressed, etc. there's a good chance a difficult conversation will result in anger for you or the other person, regardless of the actual subject matter of the conversation.

### Push the Pause Button



- If the other person is angry and you're able to listen sincerely with empathy to what they have to say, then do that.
- If you're angry and the other person can listen to you with sincerity and empathy, ask them to do that.
- If you're not willing to listen with empathy, and the other person is not willing to listen with empathy, it's unlikely that either of you will meet your needs in the conversation...so...

### **PUSH THE PAUSE BUTTON!! (exercise and details below)**

For example: "I can feel myself getting worked up to the point where I'm having a hard time hearing you. I want to be able to hear you, so I'd like to go think about this on my own and then come back to you, OK? I'll check back in with you in 20 minutes to let you know if I'm in a better place to hear you."

### What to do in the break

**CALM YOURSELF:** Once you're away from the conversation do something non-violent to calm your system. Run around the block, breathe deeply, chant, sing, shake, sit in the car and make a loud noise etc. Articles in recent years say don't hit a punch bag!

**SELF-CONNECT: Every thought you have is a package containing information about your feelings and needs, or insight into the feelings and needs of the other person!** Use tools of self-connection like the Ladder Questions or the Heart Circle, talk/vent to someone who knows how to empathize without taking sides. We also recommend therapies like Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), EMDR, somatic therapy, person-centered therapy, NVC-based therapy, NVC coaching, or other therapy or coaching approaches that work for you.

### Returning to the conversation

Once you're ready to listen and empathize with the other person, and to express your own observations, feelings, needs, and requests, return to the person you stepped away from and request that they resume the conversation with you. Make it a **connected conversation**, using NVC skills. If you get angry again, be ready to step away again. If the other person is willing, use the "Connected Conversation Process."

**NOTE:** If you never feel ready to hear the feelings and needs of the other person, and they don't feel ready to hear yours, you may need a mediator to help you proceed.

### Pushing the Pause Button – Pair Exercise

- Partner says some phrase that is clearly a moment of escalation
  - "You are...!"
  - "Why are you being so...?"
  - "That's stupid...." etc.
- Ask your partner to ramp up the emotional intensity, if necessary, if you want to get to the point where you feel a strong reaction.
- Then practice telling your partner that you want to pause: Include ALL 3 of these points:
  1. **REASON:** Why you want to pause – what needs you're hoping to meet better for yourself and for your partner. We strongly recommend that you say, "I want to pause because I..." rather than "I want to pause because you..."  
e.g. "*I want to pause because I want to think about this and figure out why I'm having such a hard time with what you're saying*" vs, "*I want to pause because you're so angry and out-of-control.*"
  2. **GUARANTEE:** Your reassurance that you will continue the conversation as soon as you're ready to listen.
  3. **TIME UNTIL CHECK IN:** A length of time (might be only a few minutes, could be longer) before you want to check in about continuing the conversation
- Partner pushes back with a comment like: "*No, we need to talk about this now*" + another inflammatory comment, or repetition of the earlier one.
- Repeat your request to pause – emphasizing or re-emphasizing any elements if that seems necessary. (This time your partner will agree!)
- Debrief
  1. What was it like for you to do?
  2. What was it like for your partner?
  3. Does your partner have any suggestions for any different ways you could have requested a pause?

