Cooling down: a menu

Ways to calm your body before you decide what to do.

When anger is high, it is hard to think clearly. Calm your body first and think afterwards. Tick the ones worth trying.

In the first minute

- [ ] Stop talking
- [ ] Breathe out slowly, five times
- [ ] Drop my shoulders, open my hands
- [ ] Count backwards from 20
- [ ] Step back, or sit down
- [ ] Say to myself: "Not now. Later."

In the next half hour

- [ ] Leave the room or go outside
- [ ] Walk fast, run or cycle
- [ ] Splash cold water on my face
- [ ] Have a glass of water
- [ ] Listen to music
- [ ] Do something with my hands
- [ ] Ring someone who calms me down
- [ ] Write it all down, then put it away

Things that feel good and make it worse

- [ ] Going over and over what they did
- [ ] Punching pillows or "letting it out"
- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Driving while angry
- [ ] Firing off a message or email
- [ ] Getting others on my side

About venting

Research suggests that hitting things or ranting keeps the body fired up and makes anger more likely next time. Burning off energy by walking or running works. Rehearsing the grievance does not.

My top five for cooling down

Where I will keep this list so I see it when I need it

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com

This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

Time out plan

Stepping away before things are said or done that cannot be taken back.

Name _____ Date _____

A time out is not storming off, and it is not avoiding the issue. It is a planned pause to let your body calm down so the conversation can go better. It works best when the people close to you know about it in advance.

The steps

1. **Notice.** I am at my step-away level.
2. **Say it.** Use the agreed words, calmly. No parting shot.
3. **Leave.** Go somewhere else for the agreed time. At least 20 minutes: the body needs that long to settle.
4. **Cool down.** Walk, breathe, stretch, splash cold water. Do not rehearse the argument. Do not drink or drive.
5. **Come back.** Return when I said I would. If I am not ready, say so and name a new time.
6. **Talk, or agree when to talk.**

My step-away level (0 to 10) and how I know I am there

The words I will use. For example: "I am getting too angry to talk well. I am taking 30 minutes and I will come back."

Where I will go

What I will do to cool down

How long, and how I will come back

Agreed with the people I live with

What they will do when I call a time out

☐ Let me go ☐ Not follow me ☐ Not have the last word

When we will come back to what the row was about

If there is any risk of violence, safety comes first. Talk to me, your GP or a support service.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.