

# Our Marital Oxygen Mask: How to Make a Time-Out Work for Both of Us to Defuse Couple Conflict

## RETREAT

- Remove yourself from the situation with as much reassurance as you can offer that you will re-engage with your spouse after the time-out.
- Thirty minutes is usually sufficient time, but you may need more time.
- The one who left should initiate the return.

## RELEASE

- Find some way to soothe yourself, relax your body and calm your mind: take a walk; draw a bath; listen to music; practice deep-breathing, meditation or muscle relaxation; work in the house or outside.
- Release those one-sided, self-righteous, blaming thoughts. Use thought-stopping, balanced self-talk, or self-reminders to help you let go of blaming attitudes.

## REFLECT

- What were you feeling deep down, underneath the surface anger? Sad? Hurt? Lonely? Afraid? Lost? Insignificant? Why were you feeling that way?
- Can you try to express those softer, more vulnerable feelings, and the relationship needs behind them, to your spouse when you return?
- Can you see your spouse's side? What part of your spouse's perspective can you see as valid and legitimate?
- Were you accusing or judgmental toward your spouse? Were you defensive? Could you have unwittingly triggered your partner to be defensive because of your tone or the way you said things? How did your own actions help perpetuate the argument?

## RETURN AND REPAIR

- Once you can see a little better: 1) your part in the problem, 2) your spouse's side as valid, 3) your own raw spots and why you were triggered to react the way you did, it is time to return and repair.
- Return with a willingness to express regret for any mistake you may have made, a softened heart toward your spouse, a desire to reconnect and to be less judgmental, and a willingness to understand your spouse's deeper emotions.