

Escalation!

When Emotions Erupt in Your Marriage

by Kevin Downing Ph.D. MFT

The research is out on **escalation** in marriage – you know, the raised voices, hot tempers, and the ugly exchange of words. (And yes – this includes passive aggressive criticisms, “jokes”, digs and negative innuendos.)

Research reveals the following about escalation:

- 1) It is one of the four **best predictors of divorce**.
- 2) We **deeply regret** what we say at the height of our anger. (This is contrary to the notion that the truth comes out when someone is upset. Not true!)
- 3) There is **nothing redeemable** here - it is poison for your relationship.

What’s the call police officers hate going on? It’s **domestic disputes**. Why? It’s because people are **irrational** – they can’t be reasoned with.

When you become highly escalated or go into a trauma state the **left side of your brain turns off!** That’s the rational part of your brain! (See **The Body Keeps the Score** by Bessel Von der Kolk p.69). Most often people who are highly escalated believe they need to solve their dispute – “right now”! But with only half a brain they aren’t going to solve anything – in fact they will make things fantastically worse. It’s best to call a **Five-Minute Time Out** (see the handout on this topic) and follow the directions.

Ground Rules –

- 1) Call **Five-Minute Time Outs** (frequently!) - see the handout on this topic.
- 2) **No name calling** of any type – those ugly names are not true about your loved one. Make your home a safe harbor – not a war zone.
- 3) **No divorce/break up talk** – this only throws you into catastrophic scenarios and is a tremendous energy drain. If you have to have this talk only do so in a counselor’s office.
- 4) **No “joking”** about your partner (or your children) of any kind.
- 5) **Get professional help if alcohol or drugs** (or other addictions) are a part of your escalations!

See **A Lasting Promise** by Scott Stanley

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