

What Will You Do When Your Partner Stonewalls You?

You can call it the silent treatment, being frozen out, or stonewalling. It's what happens in romantic relationships or workplace settings when someone refuses to discuss important issues. They tune you out, give you one-word answers, walk away, or change the subject.

It can be especially frustrating and distressing when it happens with someone you love. In fact, many relationship experts believe stonewalling is a major contributor to divorce.



If stonewalling is an issue in your relationship, **changing the way you communicate is your solution.** Try these suggestions for understanding and responding to a partner who stonewalls you.

Understanding Stonewalling

Even when the external behavior looks the same, there can be many different reasons behind stonewalling. Knowing the causes can help you to respond effectively.

Try these techniques to figure out the cause:

1. **Look back.** Your partner may be trying to protect themselves because they feel overwhelmed. This can be due to patterns they developed in childhood if they were raised in a family where feelings were seldom discussed.
2. **Recognize manipulation.** On the other hand, your partner may be trying to punish or control you. Ask yourself if there are other signs of abuse in your relationship.

3. **Cool down.** Distinguish between taking a brief break to calm down during an argument and prolonged stonewalling. **A short and strategic time out can be beneficial.**

Responding to Stonewalling

While it's natural to feel resentful and try to draw your partner out, you could be making the situation worse.

These alternatives are more likely to bring about the breakthrough you want:

1. **Express compassion.** While being frozen out is uncomfortable for you, remember that your partner is suffering too. Be sensitive to their insecurities and reassure them of your love.
2. **Engage with each other.** If there is growing distance between you, it may help to start reconnecting gradually. Put aside deeper issues temporarily and listen to a concert or go for a bike ride together.
3. **Make yourself accessible.** Let your partner know that you're available to talk when they're ready. **Be supportive rather than aggressive.**
4. **Stop nagging.** Resist the urge to nag or yell to try to make your partner talk. Pushing them too hard is likely to backfire.
5. **Work on communication skills. To overcome your differences, you both may need to strengthen your communication skills.** Practice listening, giving feedback, and monitoring your body language.
6. **Offer forgiveness.** In order to heal, you'll need to pardon each other for your past grievances. Remember that forgiveness helps you as much as the other person.
7. **Take care of yourself.** A strained relationship can take a heavy toll on your mental and physical health. Ensure that you eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and get adequate sleep.
8. **Manage stress. If possible, find ways to reduce sources of chronic tension.** If finances are tight, look for a second job or cut back on expenses. If you have

frequent arguments about parenting, clarify your priorities and set ground rules.

9. **Go for counseling.** Couples counseling is ideal, but you and your partner may also want to speak with a therapist individually. You can find support and explore your options on your own or together. In the early stages, you may also be more comfortable speaking with a professional rather than each other.
10. **Move on.** If you find that your relationship is unlikely to meet your needs, you may need to let go. That's especially true if other signs of abuse are present. Focus on the valuable lessons you've learned and build a brighter future.

Stonewalling can make you feel isolated and helpless, but **there is a way out.** If you and your partner are willing to change the way you relate to each other, you may be able to reconnect and build a healthier relationship.