



How to End the Silent Treatment



THE CHALLENGE

How do two people who have vowed to love each other get to the point where they refuse to talk for hours—or even days? ‘At least we stopped fighting,’ they tell themselves. Still, the issue has not been resolved, and they both feel uncomfortable.



WHY IT HAPPENS

Retaliation. Some spouses use silence as a form of revenge. For example, suppose a husband makes weekend plans without consulting his wife. When she finds out, she is angry and calls him inconsiderate. He responds by calling her oversensitive. The wife storms off and stewes in silence. In effect, she is saying, “You hurt me, so I am going to hurt you back.”

Manipulation. Some use the silent treatment as a means to get what they want. For example, imagine that a husband and wife plan a trip and the wife would like to take her parents along. The husband objects. “You’re married to me, not to your parents,” he says. He then gives his wife the silent treatment, shunning her in the hope that she will break down and concede to his wishes.

Of course, a temporary time-out can give a couple the opportunity to let emotions cool when an argument is getting out of hand. *That* type of silence can be beneficial. The Bible says that there is “a time to keep quiet.” (Ecclesiastes 3:7) But when it is used as a means to retaliate or manipulate, the silent treatment not only prolongs conflict but also erodes the respect the couple have for each other. How can you prevent that from happening to you?



WHAT YOU CAN DO

The first step to ending the silent treatment is to recognize it for what it is—a tactic that, at best, works only short-term. True, not talking may quench your thirst for retaliation or compel your spouse to give in to your wishes. But is that really how you want to treat someone whom you have vowed to love? There are better ways to resolve conflicts.

Be discerning. The Bible says that love “does not become provoked.” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5) So don’t overreact to such emotionally charged statements as “You never listen” or “You are always late.” Instead, discern the intent behind the words. For instance, “You never listen” might really mean “I feel as if you don’t take my viewpoint seriously.”—*Bible principle: Proverbs 14:29.*

Think of your spouse as your teammate rather than an opponent

Lower your voice. Arguments tend to escalate as they continue. On the other hand, you *can* change the direction of a heated discussion. How? The book *Fighting for Your Marriage* says: “Softening your tone and acknowledging your partner’s point of view are potent tools you can employ to diffuse tension and end escalation. Often that’s all it takes.”—*Bible principle: Proverbs 26:20.*

Think of “we” instead of “me.” The Bible says: “Let each one keep seeking, not his own advantage, but that of the other person.” (1 Corinthians 10:24) If you think of your spouse as your teammate rather than your opponent, you will be less likely to take offense, argue, and then refuse to talk to your spouse.—*Bible principle: Ecclesiastes 7:9.*

The silent treatment runs counter to the Bible’s admonition: “Let each one of you individually so love his wife as he does himself; on the other hand, the wife should have deep respect for her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33) Why not make an agreement with your spouse that the silent treatment is unacceptable in your marriage? ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He that is slow to anger is abundant in discernment.”
—Proverbs 14:29.

“Where there is no wood the fire goes out.”—Proverbs 26:20.

“Do not hurry yourself in your spirit to become offended.”
—Ecclesiastes 7:9.

THROW THE BALL GENTLY

The Bible states: “Let your utterance be always with graciousness, seasoned with salt, so as to know how you ought to give an answer to each one.” (Colossians 4:6) This certainly applies in marriage! To illustrate: In a game of catch, you toss the ball so that it can be caught easily. You do not fling it with such force that you injure your partner. Apply the same principle when speaking with your spouse. Hurling bitter remarks will only cause harm. Instead, speak gently—with graciousness—so that your mate can catch your point.—From *Awake!* January 8, 2001.