

How to Stop Shutting Down in Arguments - Checklist

Quick reference for before, during, and after a hard conversation.

Before You Start

- ☐ Notice the warning sign. Her tone shifted, she said "we need to talk," or you can feel a fight loading.
- ☐ Breathe in for four counts, hold for four, breathe out for six. Repeat five or six times.
- ☐ Pick one steady sentence to tell yourself. "I can stay in this without fixing it right now."
- ☐ Decide your exit phrase now, before any heat starts.

What To Watch For

- ☐ Your chest getting tight.
- ☐ Your heart rate climbing.
- ☐ Her voice starting to sound far away.
- ☐ A pull to leave the room or go quiet without saying why.

What To Say

- ☐ Before the talk: "I know this matters to you, and I want to actually be here for it. Give me one minute to get my head straight first."
- ☐ Mid argument, early signs: "My heart's racing right now and I'm scared I'll go quiet on you. Give me ten minutes, and I'm coming back to finish this."
- ☐ If you already went quiet: "I just went somewhere else for a second there. I'm back now. Can you say that last part again?"
- ☐ Coming back after the break: "Okay, I'm back, like I said I would be. I want to keep going. Where were we?"

What Not To Do

- ☐ Don't disappear without naming the exit.
- ☐ Don't skip the return time. A vague "later" reads as abandonment.
- ☐ Don't over apologize for the shutdown itself once you're back.
- ☐ Don't wait for her to come find you after your break.

Repair Move

If you shut down without catching it in time:

"I shut down on you back there and I know how that feels from your side. I'm not proud of it. Can we try the conversation again, maybe tomorrow?"

One clear acknowledgment is enough. Keep the focus on her, not on managing your own guilt.

Success Check

- ☐ You noticed your body maxing out before you went fully silent, and you said something instead of nothing.
- ☐ You came back at the time you said you would, even if what followed was short or imperfect.

Did your partner seem more or less defensive after you used this script?