Love In Real Life
What To Do When A Wall Goes Up In Your Relationship

1. _____
Definition: "*Stonewalling is when someone emotionally shuts down and withdraws from the interaction. It can appear they are ignoring you, pretending you aren't there."* (Kari Rusnak, LPC)

85% of stonewallers are _____

Impact: No communication; no problem solving; no repair
Mark 3:4-6 *But they wouldn't answer him. He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.*

2. _____

a) _____
Proverbs 27:4 *Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood…*

- Agree on a signal
- Take a 25-30 minute break
- Soothing not ruminating
- Come back at a set time

b) _____
Proverbs 14:29 *People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.*

Key: Practice _____

c) _____
Psalm 73:21-22 *When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant…*

d) _____
Proverbs 15:1 *A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.*

"When one person begins stonewalling, usually they are physiologically flooded, which has a number of indicators: increased heart rate, the release of stress hormones into the bloodstream, and even a fight-or-flight response. When that happens, it is impossible to continue discussing the issue at hand in a rational and respectful way; you're simply too physiologically agitated to do so."
Dr. John Gottman Blog

Common signs of stonewalling

- The silent treatment
- Abruptly walking away
- Avoiding eye contact
- Acting busy or abruptly moving on to another task
- Refusing to answer any questions
- Ignoring you or pretending they don't hear you
- Simply saying "I'm fine," and nothing else

Gentle start up formula:
I feel _____
Because _____
I need _____
Make a thoughtful request

What signal will we use that we need a 30-minute break?

"Look, we've been through this over and over again. I'm tired of reminding you—"
"Honey, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I'm feeling overwhelmed and I need to take a break. Can you give me thirty minutes and then we can talk?"

"Alright, I'm feeling too angry to keep talking about this. Can we please take a break and come back to it in a bit? It'll be easier to work through this after I've calmed down."

The Gottman's Relationship Check-In
Make time to listen, appreciate, and stay connected.

Before You Begin

- **Remove distractions.** Put away phones and turn off the TV. Take notes if helpful.
- **Pause if overwhelmed.** If either of you becomes flooded, take a break for at least 25 minutes. Agree on a time to return to the conversation.
- **Take turns.** Listen to understand. You can acknowledge your partner's experience without agreeing with their perspective.

1. Share Appreciations

Take turns naming **three to five specific things** your partner did that you appreciated. Explain why they mattered.

"I appreciate _____ because _____."

"I appreciate you doing the dishes after I cook. It helps me feel supported."

2. Notice What's Going Well

What is working or improving? Recognize progress in your communication, time together, teamwork, or shared responsibilities.

"Something I think we're doing well is _____."

3. Talk Through a Concern

Choose one issue at a time. Decide who speaks first, then switch roles. Focus on understanding before offering solutions.

SPEAKER: "I feel _____ about _____ [a specific situation], and I need _____ [a positive need]."

LISTENER: "What I hear you saying is _____. Did I get it right?"

SPEAKER: Confirm or clarify until you feel understood.

LISTENER: "I can understand why you feel _____, given _____."

Stay ATTUNED:

- **Awareness:** Notice your partner's feelings.
- **Tolerance:** Make room for different perspectives.
- **Turning toward:** Respond to their need for connection.
- **Understanding:** Get curious about their experience.
- **Non-defensive listening:** Listen without excuses or blame.
- **Empathy:** Show that their feelings and needs matter.

4. Ask for What You Need

Each person shares **one specific, attainable thing** their partner could do before the next check-in. Describe what you want them to do.

"One thing that would help me feel more loved or supported is _____. Could we _____?"

"I'd love some uninterrupted time together. Could we take a walk after dinner on Tuesday?"

Discuss what each of you can agree to do.

5. Look Ahead and Close

- Review upcoming plans, responsibilities, and outside pressures.
- Confirm what you've agreed to and anything you'll revisit.
- Ask: **"Is there anything else you need before our next check-in?"**
- Set your next check-in and close with appreciation.

Make it a habit: Check in weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Keep making space to turn toward each other.