

# MODULE 3 — COMMUNICATION UNDER STRESS

## The Calm Response Protocol

### THE CORE SKILL: PAUSE → REGULATE → SPEAK

When your spouse is disrespectful, your nervous system activates. You either explode, shut down, or say things you regret. The Calm Response Protocol lets you stay regulated even when they are dysregulated.

### STEP 1: RECOGNIZE FLOODING (You are losing it)

#### Signs you are flooded:

- Heart racing, chest tight
- Words coming fast, voice getting loud
- Feeling defensive or angry
- Brain going blank or obsessing
- Wanting to yell, cry, or leave

When you recognize this → PAUSE immediately

### STEP 2: TAKE A BREAK (20-30 minutes minimum)

DO NOT try to communicate while flooded. Your brain cannot think clearly.

Say calmly: "I need a break right now. I will be back in 30 minutes to talk about this when we can both be calmer."

Then LEAVE. Do not explain. Do not negotiate.

#### During the break:

- ✓ Walk or exercise
- ✓ Breathe deeply (4 counts in, 6 counts out)
- ✓ Do something calming

✗ DO NOT rehearse what you will say

✗ DO NOT text or message about it

## STEP 3: RETURN REGULATED (Brain back online)

### After 20-30 minutes:

- Your prefrontal cortex is back online
- You can think clearly
- You can access wisdom and compassion
- You can speak from your values, not your pain

## COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK: SPEAK FROM CORE NEEDS

When regulated, use this framework:

"When you [BEHAVIOR], I experience [YOUR EMOTION]. What I need is [CLEAR NEED]."

### Example:

"When you raise your voice at me, I feel hurt and unsafe. What I need is for us to pause and talk about this calmly."

## DO NOT USE:

✗ "You always..."

✗ "You make me..."

✗ "You never..."

✗ Blame, criticism, judgment

## FOUR KEY PHRASES TO USE

1. BUYING TIME	"I need to take a break. I will be back in 30 minutes."
2. STAYING CALM	"I hear you. I want to understand better. Can we talk about this calmly?"

<b>3. SETTING A LIMIT</b>	<b>"I am not willing to continue this conversation when you are yelling."</b>
<b>4. ENDING THE CONVERSATION</b>	<b>"I care about this marriage. This conversation is not productive right now. We will try again when we are both calmer."</b>

## THE GOAL IS NOT TO WIN

### Remember:

- ✓ Goal is to UNDERSTAND, not prove you are right
- ✓ Goal is to CONNECT, not win the argument
- ✓ Goal is to PROTECT, not punish
- ✓ Goal is to INTERRUPT the cycle

## QUICK CHECKLIST DURING CONFLICT

### Am I flooded? YES / NO

If YES → Take a break immediately

### Am I speaking from regulation? YES / NO

If NO → Pause. Breathe. Wait.

### Is my tone calm and steady? YES / NO

If NO → Stop. Collect yourself.

### Am I speaking from my values? YES / NO

If NO → Reframe what you are saying