



AN EFT HANDOUT

# WHEN YOU'RE IN THE CYCLE

You have already mapped your cycle: your positions, what you each hope for, what you each fear. This is the harder part, the one that happens in real time. When one of you gets sharp and the other goes quiet, here is what to do in the moment.



### THE ONE SHIFT

In the moment, aim to **de-escalate, not resolve**. No one can solve the actual problem while one of you is activated and the other has gone quiet. Step out of the cycle, let your bodies settle, and come back to the content later, calm. Trying to settle it mid-cycle is what keeps it going.

## YOUR PART, IN THE MOMENT

You already know your position. When you feel the cycle start (heart speeding up, chest tightening, the urge to push or to go cold), catch your own pull and do the opposite of it.

### BEFORE EITHER MOVE

Name the cycle out loud, aimed at the cycle and not each other. Agree on one phrase you will both use, like **“we’re in it”** or **“the cycle has us.”** Saying it makes the cycle the shared problem you are facing together, which cools the moment faster than anything you can say about the content.

### THE SHARP ONE

#### THE PULL

Turning up the volume, pressing for an answer, or reaching for the line you know will land.

#### WHAT IT REALLY IS

Fear of losing the connection, coming out as heat. Under the sharp words is someone trying not to lose you.

#### YOUR MOVE

Slow down and lower your voice. Name the softer feeling under the sharpness (“I’m scared we’re drifting”) and make one clear ask, one need rather than a list of complaints. The soft opening is what lets your partner stay in the room.

### THE QUIET ONE

#### THE PULL

Going silent, leaving the room, or waiting for it to blow over.

#### WHAT IT REALLY IS

Flooding and self-protection, often with shame underneath. The quiet is the nervous system trying to stop the pain from getting worse, even when it looks like not caring.

#### YOUR MOVE

Send a staying signal before you shut down: “I’m overwhelmed, I’m not leaving, I need a minute.” Stay a beat longer than feels safe and say one true thing. It can come out clumsy; what helps is that you stayed and said it.



## WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

---

The same fight, caught early and turned around. Yours will use your words, but the moves are these.

**The Sharp One**

**THE PULL**

“You forgot the pharmacy again. I can never count on you for anything.”

**Either of you**

**NAMES IT**

“Wait. We’re in it. This is the cycle.”

**The Sharp One**

**SOFTENS, ONE NEED**

“Let me try that again. When things slip, I start to feel like I am holding all of it alone, and that scares me. Can we set up one shared reminder so it is not all on me?”

**The Quiet One**

**STAYING SIGNAL**

“I can feel myself wanting to shut down. I am not leaving. Give me a second.”

**The Quiet One**

**ONE TOPIC**

“I hear you, and I do not want you carrying it alone either. Let us put one reminder on both our phones right now.”

## WHEN YOU'RE FLOODED, TAKE A REAL BREAK

---

Pounding heart, hot ears, no room to hear your partner: that is flooding, and no repair happens from there. A structured break is the counter-move.

### 1 Call the break, do not vanish

A time-out is not a walkout. Say you are taking one: “I’m flooded, I need twenty minutes.” Vanishing reads as abandonment and pulls the other partner back into the chase.

### 2 Set the return time first

Agree on when you will come back before you separate. The return time is what makes stepping away feel safe instead of like being left behind.

### 3 Settle your body, not your case

Twenty to thirty minutes of something calming: a walk, water, slow breathing, music. Replaying the argument in your head keeps you flooded and defeats the point of the break.

### 4 Come back when you said you would

Even if it is only to say you are steadier now and to pick a time for the real conversation. Keeping the return is what rebuilds the trust the cycle wears down.



**COMING BACK**

Start soft. Lead with one repair or appreciation ("I'm sorry I got sharp") before the content. Take one topic, keep it short, and if it reignites, name the cycle again and take another break. Needing more than one pass is normal.

**SET THIS UP WHILE YOU'RE CALM**

Fill these in together now, before the next flare, so the moves are ready when you need them. Keep it somewhere you will both see it.

**Our signal to name the cycle**

Examples: "we're in it," "the cycle has us," "pause."

Ours: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Our break, and who reconvenes**

We take \_\_\_\_\_ minutes, and \_\_\_\_\_ sends the text to come back.

**Sharp One, your soft opening**

Example: "I'm scared we're drifting. Can we handle the errands as a team?" Lead with the feeling, ask for one thing.

Ours: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Quiet One, your staying signal**

Examples: "I'm flooded, I need a minute, I'm not leaving." "This is a lot, give me a sec, I still want to talk."

Ours: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**De-escalation is a skill, and skills take reps.** You will not do it cleanly the first few times, and that is not failure. The deeper work, where the cycle loses its charge instead of only getting managed, is learning to reach for each other from the softer feelings underneath. That part is what we do together in session. Adapted from Sue Johnson's Emotionally Focused Therapy and the Gottman research on flooding. My Mental Climb is not affiliated with or endorsed by Dr. Sue Johnson, ICEEFT, or The Gottman Institute.

**EDUCATIONAL ONLY, NOT THERAPY.**

