**Taking a breather handout**

*Taking a Breather* is a tool to help you avoid being violent and abusive. When you notice your escalation (feeling angry, tense and winding yourself up), taking a breather can help you to calm down, sort out the issues and remain non-abusive.

*Taking a Breather* is not a ‘walk out’. A walk-out is when you leave your partner to avoid talking about something you don’t want to talk about, leaving her with no idea about when you will return or what state you will be in when you return. A walk-out is an act of abuse.

*Taking a Breather* is about giving yourself some time to ground yourself, gain some distance from your unhelpful thoughts, and to challenge rather than indulge in these thoughts – **only** **if you cannot apply these techniques while remaining in the situation**.

There are 5 steps to *Taking a Breather.*

**Step 1 – Prepare**

This step needs to happen *before* the next time you get wound up (escalation).

Find a time when both you and your partner are not busy, and when you are not tense. Ask if your partner is willing to discuss the *Taking a Breather* technique with you. You can ask (not demand) for another time if your partner does not want to talk to you now.

When you discuss this, explain that in situations where you feel that you need to, you will use *Taking a Breather* to help end your abusive behaviour. Explain that you will use *Taking a Breather* to practice tools that you are learning in the program to return in a respectful and non-abusive manner.

Discuss with your partner how you will leave for an agreed period of time and not return unless she agrees. If she does not feel you should return after the agreed period, agree on a second Breather or an alternative place to stay for a period. Agree the signal that you will use, so your partner knows you are leaving for a *Breather* and not trying to avoid the issues that need to be discussed.

**Ask your partner how she would like you to use *Taking a Breather*. You might adjust or change some of the details in this handout, depending on what you negotiate and what will help your partner to feel safe.**

Remember that if you deliberately misuse *Taking a Breather*, you are being abusive.

It is up to you, not your partner, to take responsibility for taking *Breathers* when you need them. This is not for your partner to use. It is for your use only.

**Step 2 – Leave respectfully**

Find a space away from the situation. Where you go will depend in part on what you have negotiated with your partner about how much time you will be away.

Remember that *Taking a Breather* is not a walk-out. Your partner needs to know when you will return, and that while you are away, you are working on strategies to be non-violent and non-abusive when you return.

**Step 3 – After leaving**

After you leave, do not drink or use drugs. They only make a bad situation worse. Taking a breather is for serious thinking about how to return in a safe and non-abusive way – this will be harder to do if you are affected by drink or drugs.

It might also be best not to drive, as if you are feeling tense and hyped up, your ability to react to events on the road might be affected.

Don’t use any behaviours that are or could be seen as aggressive, such as punching a boxing bag or pillow, breaking things, chopping wood, watching violent movies, etc. Contrary to some popular opinion, these will generally not help. You are only likely to wind up more.

**Practice grounding techniques. Take a walk or do another non-aggressive physical exercise that will help you to feel less hyped. Concentrate on your breathing.**

**Practice what you’re learning in the program to gain some distance from unhelpful thoughts, and to then challenge rather than indulge in them.**

## It might be good to contact a friend or a crisis contact who will be a positive influence on you to keep everyone safe and to not use violence and abuse. Consider calling the Men’s Referral Service 1300 766 491 who can help you to return to the situation calmly.

## Do not contact someone who might sympathise with your unhelpful thoughts, and who might ‘take your side’ against your partner. You need support from someone who will help you to gain some distance from your unhelpful thoughts, to get out of your tunnel thinking – not someone who will add fuel to the fire.

**Step 4 – Plan your return**

Think of a positive plan of action for when you return. This can involve listening and finding compromises that you can both live with.

Phone home before returning and ask if your partner wants to talk about the issues when you return – she might not, if she is feeling unsafe or doesn’t trust that you can discuss them non-abusively.

**Step 5 – Return non-abusively**

Return and practice the skills you are learning in the program. Take another *Breather* if you escalate again.

**The Seven R’s of *Taking a Breather:***

***Remove* – yourself from the immediate vicinity in a respectful way, for an agreed time**

***Remember –* it’s not a walk-out**

***Relax* – apply grounding and breathing techniques, go for a walk. Don’t do anything aggressive**

***Reflect* – think back to what just happened. What were my unhelpful thoughts that I was winding myself up on? Gain distance from and challenge the thoughts**

***Rehearse* – plan how you will return. Consider your words, the look on your face, your body language**

***Return* – come back at the agreed time**

***Retry* – check in whether your partner wants to continue the conversation (remember, she might not feel safe to do so). Safely re-engage in the conversation using your plan, if she does.**