

Fix Your Next Fight

*A 10-Minute Reset for Couples Stuck in the Same
Argument*

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THE REAL PROBLEM

You don't have a "communication problem."

You have a *pattern* problem.

Research across decades of couples therapy shows the same thing:

- Couples don't fight about new issues
- They repeat the same emotional loop
- And it escalates faster every time

Most couples don't fail from conflict.

They fail from repeating the same unresolved pattern.

These patterns are cycles driven by [attachment needs](#)—our deep need to feel **safe, seen, and valued** by our partner.

When conflict turns into criticism, defensiveness, or withdrawal, relationships start to break down ([Read more](#)).

And even more important:

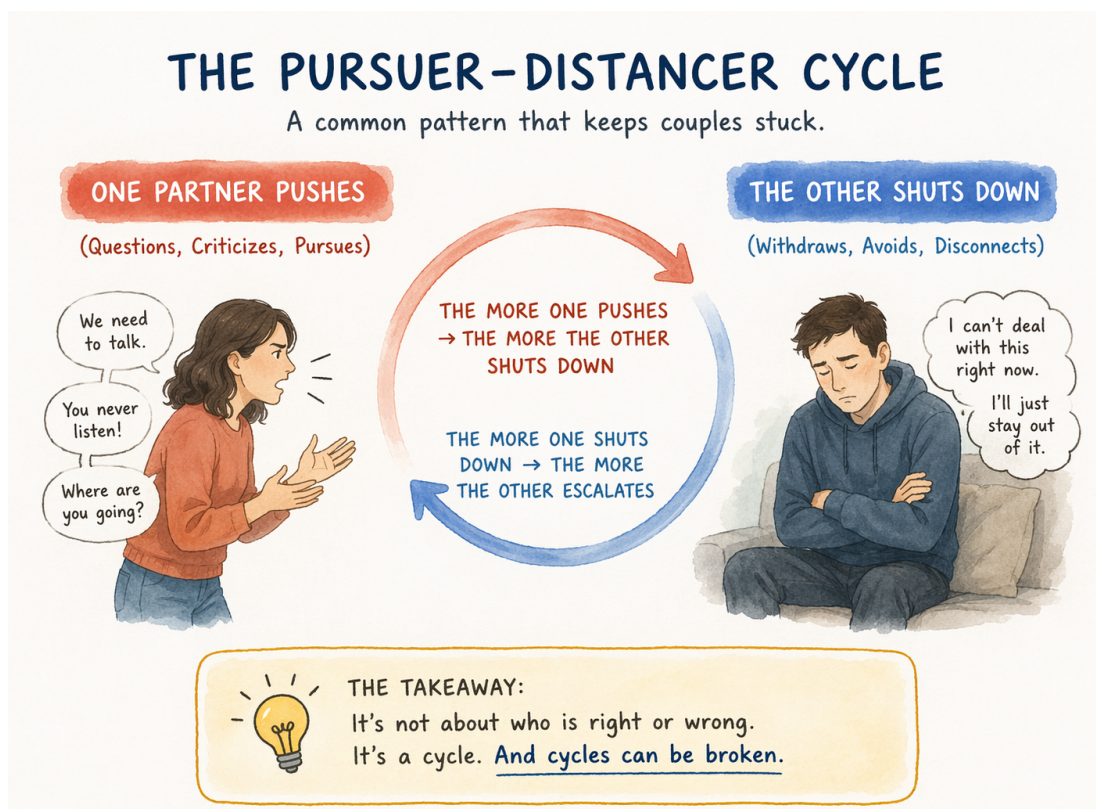
👉 When your nervous system feels threatened, you stop acting like a partner—and start acting like you're under attack.

THE PATTERN

Most couples fall into one version of this loop:

The Pursue-Withdraw Cycle (Pursuer—Distancer)

- One partner pushes (questions, criticizes, pursues)
- The other shuts down (withdraws, avoids, disconnects)
- The more one pushes → the more the other shuts down
- The more one shuts down → the more the other escalates



This is not personality.

This is **attachment panic**.

Underneath the fight:

- One is asking: “Do I matter to you?”
- The other is asking: “Am I failing you?”

But it doesn't sound like that.

It sounds like:

- “You never listen!”
- “You're overreacting!”
- “I'm done with this conversation!”

WHY YOUR FIGHTS ESCALATE

Here's what's actually happening in real time:

1. Threat is detected

Your brain reads your partner's tone, face, or words as danger.

2. Your nervous system reacts

Fight, flight, or freeze kicks in automatically.

Research emphasizes that couples must learn to co-regulate each other's nervous systems.

3. You lose access to your best self

You stop being:

- Curious
- Calm

- Empathic

And start being:

- Defensive
- Critical
- Shut down

4. The pattern takes over

At this point, you're not solving anything.

You're just replaying the loop.

*If your heart rate is above 100, [you're flooded](#). Take a 20-min break. Nothing good will happen when either of you are dysregulated. For the healing you want you need to [co-regulate](#), so employ [some steps](#) to soothe your nervous system.

THE 3-STEP RESET (USE THIS DURING YOUR NEXT FIGHT)

This is your interrupt.

Step 1: PAUSE THE ESCALATION

Say:

“We’re getting pulled into the same fight again. Let’s slow this down.”

Why this works:

- It shifts from attack → awareness
- It interrupts automatic escalation

(Gottman calls this a repair attempt, and it’s one of the strongest predictors of relationship success.)

Step 2: NAME THE PATTERN (NOT THE PERSON)

Say:

“I think I’m pushing, and you’re shutting down.”

NOT:

- “You always avoid”
- “You never listen”

Why this works:

- You externalize the problem
- You stop making your partner the enemy

(Sue Johnson, founder of Emotionally Focused Therapy called it the Demon Dialogue, taking the focus off of the partners and on their pattern.)

Step 3: SHARE THE REAL EMOTION (THIS IS THE HARD PART)

Instead of:

“You don’t care about me”

Say:

“When this happens, I feel like I don’t matter to you.”

Or:

“I feel like I’m failing and can’t get it right.”

Why this works:

- You move from attack → vulnerability
- That’s what actually creates connection

Change happens when partners can access and express underlying attachment emotions safely.

THE RULE MOST COUPLES BREAK

Do NOT solve the problem yet.

If you try to fix the issue before both people feel understood:

👉 The fight will restart.

Instead:

1. Slow down
2. Reflect back what you heard
3. Cultivate empathy (What is your partner feeling? Name it.)

Only when both feel heard should you move to problem-solving.

NOTE: Affirming and validating your partner (i.e., hearing them) **DOES NOT MEAN YOU AGREE WITH THEM!** It means you are speaking from a place of empathy and compassion for what they are feeling and thinking.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

You'll know this is working when:

- Fights slow down instead of escalate
- One of you calls out the pattern mid-conflict
- You feel understood—even if you still disagree

Important Data from Couples Research:

- Secure relationships are not conflict-free
- In fact, 69% of the issues that come up are “perpetual problems” according to Gottman
- Only 31% of couples’ problems are solvable
- The Goal is Management: Successful couples focus on navigating their differences with humor, empathy, and dialogue rather than fixing them entirely
- Gridlock: If perpetual problems are not managed well, they become “gridlocked,” which leads to frustration, bitterness, and emotional disengagement.

IF YOU'RE STILL STUCK

If you've tried to change this pattern and can't:

That's normal.

Because you're not just dealing with communication—

You're dealing with:

- Attachment history
- Emotional triggers
- Nervous system reactivity
- Family of origin issues
- Trauma
- Personal sexual stories
- Coping skills (good and bad)
- Other mental health issues: depression, anxiety, personality disorders, etc

However, patterns are predictable—and therefore changeable with the right structure.

If you're stuck in the same fight and can't break it on your own:

This is exactly the work I do with couples.

👉 Schedule a session:

www.westbreedlove.com

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