

# The STOP Method

Excerpted from *Empowered to Love* by Robert S. Paul and Tara Lalonde

The STOP Method is used by Robert S. Paul and Tara LaLonde as part of their Care Cycle training for healthy marriages and explained in their book, *Empowered to Love: Discovering Your God-Given Power to Create a Marriage You Both Love*.

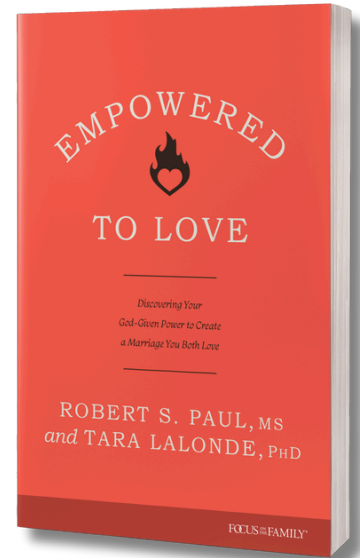
There are five stages to the Care Cycle:

1. Aware
2. Accept
3. Allow
4. Attend
5. Act

In the first part of the care cycle, when you become aware that you are being triggered in a conversation with your spouse (or anyone, for that matter!), you may find that your emotional or body sensations feel very intense. You may be so wound up that you cannot move on to the next step in the Care Cycle. This could happen because you're trying to resist feeling these sensations, or it could be that the sensations feel scary or dangerous. When sensations feel too intense, it typically indicates that you may be outside your window of tolerance and need to focus on neutral sensations to help get back to a grounded ventral state.

Learning to identify these feelings is the first step to getting back to your grounded state. When you become aware of being in one of these modes, you can choose to shift your focus from overwhelming distress to intentionally noticing things around you in the present moment. This will help you get back to your more mature adult state. The STOP method can be helpful in these moments.

Here's how it works:



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**S** Tell yourself to **stop**. Literally. Even say it aloud if you're in a place where you can. Stop spinning. Stop ramping yourself up with the negative or discouraging thoughts you are letting run through your mind. Stop looking through the eyes of the shadow monster or the hedgehog. They aren't helping you right now.

**T** **Take a deep breath** (or a couple). Breathe in for a count of four and out for a count of eight. This helps activate the calming part of the parasympathetic nervous system. Remind yourself that there is enough air around you to breathe.

**O** **Observe** what is going on in this moment. This is where you try to pay attention to things with all five of your senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste). Notice what it feels like to sit or stand where you are. How do your feet feel as you press them into the ground? Bring your attention to the contact points where your legs touch the chair or surface you're sitting on. Can you feel the sensation of your clothing on your body? What does it feel like if you move your body, even a micromovement like wiggling your big toe? Can you pick up on any smells? Consider smelling calming essential oils like lavender, mint, or orange if you have any. Try putting a piece of gum or food in your mouth and notice the tastes and sensations. Do you see any pleasant colors around you? Do you hear any sounds? Perhaps you notice movements in your body. If so, don't try to stop them; instead, see if you can intentionally slow them down. This will allow your nervous system to complete the movement in a safe way that may not have been possible in a past trauma.

**P** **Pull back** and put things into perspective. As you begin to feel calmer, remind yourself that you are an adult now, and you're allowed to feel safe when you are safe. Nothing dangerous is happening in this moment. Give yourself permission to feel that sense of safety and calm. Emotions and body sensations are information. They are not dangerous.