

In interpersonal relationships and psychology, the deliberate use of silence to punish, control, or force a behavioral response is known as the silent treatment. It is considered a form of passive-aggressive manipulation and emotional abuse.

While there are healthy ways to ask for space or step away to calm down (which involves communicating your need for a break), the silent treatment crosses into manipulation when it is used as a power play to make the other person feel guilty, anxious, or desperate to apologize. It is a highly effective control tactic because humans have a natural, neurological need for social connection.

If you are dealing with someone who uses this dynamic, recognizing that the silence is a deliberate choice—rather than a reflection of your own faults—is the most effective way to neutralize its power.

If you would like to better understand your situation, tell me: How often does this person use silence during a disagreement? Does it happen after you express a specific need or boundary? I can provide strategies for setting boundaries and responding to this behavior calmly.