Lumina Sanctum

WELLBEING

The Chase & the Shutdown

Why one of you pushes to talk while the other goes quiet, and three things you can try this week to stop the loop.

A FREE GUIDE BY BIANCA TIRON · RELATIONSHIP COACH

START HERE

If this sounds like your home, keep reading.

It starts small. A late reply. A sigh. A plan that changed without a word.

One of you says, "*Can we talk about this?*" The other says, "*Not now.*"

So the first one tries harder: more questions, a sharper tone, following the other from room to room. And the second one goes quieter: eyes on the phone, short answers, the front door, the shower, sleep.

By the end of the night, one of you feels **abandoned** and the other feels **attacked**. And next week, over something completely different, it happens again.

You're not broken. You're in a loop.

Couples researchers call this the **pursue–withdraw pattern**. It is one of the most common patterns in relationships that end up in coaching or therapy, and it shows up in loving, committed couples. It isn't proof that you're wrong for each other. It's proof that you both care, and are protecting the connection in opposite ways.

> *"Love is a vulnerable dance in the dark, on the edge of a cliff."*

This guide shows you the steps of the dance you're stuck in, so you can choose different ones.

THE TWO ROLES

Two people. One fear.

Most couples have a “chaser” and a “shutter”. Sometimes you swap roles depending on the topic, but usually one of you leans in and the other pulls back.

THE ONE WHO CHASES

“Are you still there?”

What it looks like: questions, texts, raised voice, criticism, needing to sort it out **right now**, not letting it go.

What it feels like inside: panic, loneliness, being shut out, a sense that silence means you don’t matter.

What they’re really asking: “Do I still matter to you? Will you come back to me?”

THE ONE WHO SHUTS DOWN

“I can’t get this right.”

What it looks like: silence, “I’m fine”, scrolling, walking away, going blank, agreeing just to make it stop.

What it feels like inside: overwhelm, failure, being criticised, a sense that anything you say will make it worse.

What they’re really asking: “Can I be enough for you without getting it wrong?”

Notice that both of you are trying to **protect the relationship**. The chaser protects it by reaching. The shutter protects it by calming things down. The tragedy is that each person’s protection is exactly what scares the other.

THE LOOP

How one small moment becomes the same fight.

1

Distance is felt

A late reply, a cold tone, a change of plans. Something small lands as “I’m not important.”

2

The chaser reaches

Questions, texts, pressure to talk now. It comes out as criticism: “You always...”, “You never...”

3

The shutter pulls back

It feels like an attack. Silence, the phone, leaving the room. Trying to stop it getting worse.

4

The chaser panics

Silence feels like abandonment, so they push harder. And the loop speeds up.

The same fight, a different topic

The most important sentence in this guide

Your partner is not the enemy. The loop is. When you can both point at the loop together, “we’re doing it again”, instead of pointing at each other, the fight starts losing its power.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR BODY

Shutting down isn't not caring. Chasing isn't controlling.

In the middle of a fight, your body treats a raised voice or a cold silence like a threat. Your heart rate climbs, your breathing changes, and the part of your brain that listens, reasons and chooses kind words goes offline.

Relationship researcher **Dr John Gottman** called this being "flooded". His work with couples found that once someone is flooded, it takes around **20 minutes** for their body to calm down enough to talk properly again. Trying to "sort it out now" while one of you is flooded almost never works.

FOR THE CHASER

Their silence is very often **overwhelm**, not indifference. They may be flooded long before you are. Pushing harder at that moment pushes them further away from you, not closer.

FOR THE SHUTTER

Their pushing is very often **alarm**, not control. Silence with no explanation feels like being left. A short "I need a break, I'm coming back" changes everything.

Where it really comes from

The intensity rarely belongs only to tonight. It is usually an older wound being pressed: a childhood where love disappeared when you got it wrong, a past partner who left, a home where conflict meant danger. Your partner didn't create that wound. But in this loop, you keep pressing on each other's.

THE LUMINA APPROACH

Who is holding your remote control?

Imagine you were born holding a remote control for your own feelings. Over the years, without noticing, you handed it to other people: your parents, your exes, your partner. Now they press the buttons, and you react.

Most of the buttons are made of **expectations we never said out loud**. We learned them from our families, our culture and the relationships we watched growing up. “If you loved me, you’d text back.” “If you respected me, you wouldn’t raise this now.” When our partner doesn’t meet an expectation they didn’t know existed, it feels like rejection, and the loop starts.

Taking your remote back

- **Name the expectation.** What did I silently expect to happen just then?
- **Say it, or let it go.** An expectation you never say out loud isn’t fair to hold against anyone.
- **Notice the button.** Which old feeling just got pressed: abandoned, controlled, not good enough?

Before you respond in a heated moment, ask yourself one question:

> *“Am I loving myself right now, or am I self-sabotaging, by clinging or by pushing away?”*

That pause, when you step back and watch yourself like an observer, is the difference between **reacting** and **responding**.

TRY THIS WEEK

Three small changes that break the loop.

1 Agree a pause signal, with a return time

Choose a word or gesture that means “I’m flooded, I need a break, I’m not leaving you.” The person who pauses **always says when they’ll come back**: “I need 20 minutes. I’ll come and find you at 8:30.” A pause with a return time calms the chaser. Permission to pause calms the shutter.

2 Start soft

How a conversation starts usually decides how it ends. Swap “You always…” for: “*I feel… about… and what I need is…*”
For example: “*I felt lonely tonight when we were both on our phones. Could we have 15 minutes together before bed?*”

3 The one who left comes back first

After a pause, the partner who stepped away makes the first move back, even with something small: “I’m back. I want to hear you.” This one habit teaches the chaser that silence isn’t abandonment, and teaches the shutter that they can return safely.

Practise when it’s calm. Agree all three on a good day, not in the middle of a fight. Write your pause word on the fridge if you have to. It will feel clumsy at first, and that’s normal.

REFLECTION

Questions to answer on your own, then together.

Answer these privately first. If it feels safe, share one answer each with your partner, and listen without defending yourself.

1. In our loop, am I usually the one who chases or the one who shuts down?

2. What is the small moment that usually sets us off?

3. When I chase or shut down, what am I really afraid of?

4. Which unspoken expectation did I hold my partner to this week?

5. What would help me feel safe enough to stay in the conversation?



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WHEN YOU'RE READY

You don't have to untangle this alone.

I'm Bianca Tiron, a relationship coach based in St Albans. I help couples who keep having the same fight, and individual partners who feel stuck in the chase or the shutdown, to understand the wounds behind the loop and build a relationship where both of you feel safe again.

I coach couples together or one partner on their own, online across the UK, or as walk-and-talk sessions in St Albans.

Book a free 20-minute call

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An important note. This guide is for couples where both people are safe. If you feel afraid of your partner, are being controlled, threatened or hurt, this pattern is not the issue, and coaching is not the right first step. In the UK you can call the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Refuge) on 0808 2000 247**, the **Men's Advice Line on 0808 801 0327**, or **Samaritans on 116 123**, any time. In an emergency, call 999.