



How to ask for what you need in a relationship

Cut out the card along the dashed line (6 by about 4 inches). Say one line, then stop and listen. Use your own words when they come.

Asking for what you need

1. Pick a calm moment and ask if now works.
2. Name the feeling: "I've been feeling..."
3. Ask for one specific thing they could do this week.
4. Offer a trial: "Can we try it for two weeks?"
5. If they say no: "Which part could work for you?"
6. Notice and thank them when they follow through.

All the lines, and when to use them

Is now a good time to ask you for something small? It's not a big deal, but it's been on my mind. (Before the request itself, when your partner is not rushing out the door. Checking timing makes it easier for them to hear the ask as an ask.)

I've been feeling lonely in the evenings. Could we put our phones away after dinner on weeknights? (A need for more connection. Feeling first, then one concrete behavior with a time attached.)

When I walk in from work, I need about twenty minutes to myself before we talk about the day. Can we try that? (A need for space that could otherwise look like rejection. Saying it out loud prevents your partner from guessing why you disappear upstairs.)

I don't need you to solve this. I need you to tell me you're on my side. (In the middle of a hard moment, when you can feel your partner reaching for advice you do not want.)

This isn't a complaint about last night. It's a request for next time: at your friend's place, can you check in with me once in a while? (The need came up in a specific situation and you want to keep it from sounding like blame.)

Would you be willing to try it for two weeks? Then we can see how it's going and change it if it doesn't work. (Your partner seems hesitant. A short trial is easier to agree to than a permanent new rule.)

I realize I've been hinting instead of asking. So, plainly: I'd love it if you planned a date for us this month. (You have dropped hints that went nowhere and want to reset honestly, without blaming them for missing the hints.)

Okay, that's a no for now. Which part of it could work for you? (They decline. It keeps the conversation open and moves you toward something you can both say yes to.)

Thank you for doing that. I noticed, and it really helped. (A few days after they follow through. Noticing the change makes the next request feel safer for both of you.)

Phrases to avoid

"You should know what I need by now.": It turns the need into a test your partner has already failed. Even people who love you well are not mind readers.

"Never mind, it's fine.": Withdrawing the request when it gets uncomfortable teaches both of you that your needs are negotiable down to nothing.

"Why can't you ever just...": Always and never words make the request about their character, and they will defend their character instead of hearing the ask.

"Sam's partner surprises him with dinner every Friday.": Comparisons invite resentment and a debate about Sam. Ask for what you want directly instead.

A sigh, a slammed cupboard, or a pointed look at the dishes: Signals feel safer than words, but they are easy to miss or misread, and they tend to come across as criticism without content.

If you are afraid of your partner, scripts are not the answer: call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. In danger, call 911.