



How do you tell your partner you need space without hurting them?

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.

Saying you need space

1. Say what, why, and when: "I need a break. I'm too wound up. Back at 8:30."
2. "It's not about you" if it isn't.
3. During the break, calm down. Don't rehearse comebacks.
4. Come back on time and start with their side.
5. Agree on a break word on a calm day.

All the lines, and when to use them

I'm at the point where I'll say something I regret. Let me cool off, and I'll knock on the office door in half an hour. (Mid-argument, when you feel flooded. A specific place and time to resume makes the break a pause rather than an exit.)

If we keep going right now, it'll get worse, not better. Please give me the half hour, and you'll have my full attention after. (Your partner wants to finish it now and follows you. Acknowledge the cost to them and repeat the return time.)

I had a brutal day and I need thirty minutes on my own before I'm good company. It's not about you. Can we catch up over dinner? (Coming home drained. Naming that it is not about them stops your partner from reading your quiet as a mood about the relationship.)

I know when I go quiet it can feel like I'm pulling away. I'm not. I recharge alone, and I'll be back to normal by tonight. (Your partner is more anxious about distance than you are. Explaining what space means for you, in advance, saves a lot of misreading.)

I'd like Saturday mornings to myself for a while, to run and read. Can we work out what that means for the rest of the weekend? (You want regular time alone, not just a break from a fight. Treating it as a scheduling question makes it a plan you build together.)

I need some alone time this weekend, and I don't want you to feel shut out. What would help you while I take it? (Your partner tends to feel left when you step back. Asking what would help them shows the space is not a withdrawal of care.)

I need a few days with less contact to think about where I'm at. I'll call you Thursday evening, and I'm not ending things by doing this. (In a dating or long-distance relationship, when you need to think something through. Spell out what the space is and is not, and give a date.)

Going offline for the evening. Nothing's wrong, just tired. Talk tomorrow morning. (By text, when you will be unreachable for a while. One line prevents an evening of worried messages.)

Okay, I'm back and calmer. I cut you off earlier. What were you trying to tell me? (Returning after the break. Coming back on time and starting with their side is what makes the next break easier for your partner to accept.)

Phrases to avoid

"I'm done.": It is unclear whether you mean done with the conversation or done with the relationship, and a frightened partner will assume the worst.

Walking out without saying anything: Your partner is left with no idea whether or when you are coming back, which is exactly what makes a pursuer pursue.

"Just leave me alone!": Shouted, it sounds like rejection. "I need some time alone, I'll find you at 7" asks for the same thing without the sting.

"We'll talk about it later.": Without a time, "later" often turns into never, and your partner learns that your breaks are a way to avoid topics.

"I need space" by text, then days of silence: Space with no contact and no date feels like a slow breakup, even if that is not what you mean.

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.