

Asking for Space Without Disappearing

Everything written about space is addressed to the other person. How to give an avoidant partner room, how to wait it out, how not to chase. Almost none of it is written to you, the one who actually needs the hour or the evening or the weekend and who has worked out by now that taking it without saying anything creates a worse situation than the one you were getting away from. The withdrawal is not what does the damage. The unannounced withdrawal is. These are the sentences that separate the two.

Who this is for: You go quiet when it becomes too much, you know the silence costs more than the space is worth, and you have never had a sentence ready for the moment it starts.

The scripts

1. Before you have hit the wall

The cheapest version, and the one nobody uses.

"I can feel myself going. Can I take twenty minutes now rather than later?"

"I want to finish this. I need to do it after supper, not now."

My early-warning signs, in the order they turn up:

My version, said at half capacity rather than at none:

2. Mid-conversation

The hardest ask, made while somebody is mid-sentence.

"I have stopped taking anything in. Can we pause and start again at nine?"

"I am not walking out on this. Twenty minutes and I will come back to it."

What I usually say instead when I want out of a conversation:

My version, with the resume time inside the sentence:

The line about their behaviour that I am going to leave out:

3. When you have already gone quiet for two days

Late, and still worth sending.

"I went quiet and I know that is hard. I was not doing it at you."

"I am here. I should have said something on Tuesday rather than nothing."

"Can I have until Sunday, and then I want to talk properly?"

The explanation I want to give that is not really true:

4. The re-entry sentence

How you come back matters more than how you left.

"I am back. That was about work and my own head, not about you."

"Thank you for not chasing me. I know that was not comfortable."

"I am ready to pick up Thursday whenever you are."

One true detail about where I went that I can say out loud:

My version, without pretending nothing happened:

5. What not to say

Four lines that make it worse, and their replacements.

"I need space." Rewrite it with a length and a return point:

"I'll text you when I'm ready." What is wrong with it, in my words:

Which of the four do I say most often?

My replacement line, written now while nothing is happening:

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