

Loving an Anxious Partner: A Practice Sheet

You said you needed an hour. By the time you came back there had been four messages, and the fourth one was about whether you still want to be in the relationship. From where you are standing that is an enormous leap from a very small sentence. From where they are standing there was no leap at all, because the sentence that arrived was not the sentence you sent. An activated attachment system reliably receives a worse version, and the distortion is consistent enough to be worth learning.

Who this is for: You said you needed an hour, came back to four messages, and cannot work out how a sentence that small turned into a question about whether you still want the relationship.

The translations

1. "I need some time"

Meant as an hour. Received as an ending.

How I usually ask for time, word for word:

The end point I could add to it:

My rewrite: "I need ____ until ____, and then ____."

What I would like them to do with that hour:

2. "I am fine"

Nobody says this while fine, and everyone knows it.

What I actually mean when I say I am fine:

A one-line true version I would be willing to say:

The part I do not want to discuss, and when I would:

3. "Can we talk about it tomorrow"

A postponement with no time on it reads as never.

The last thing I postponed without naming a time:

When exactly tomorrow, in words I would actually use:

What I will do if I have to move it again:

One sentence to say tonight that makes the wait bearable:

4. "You are overreacting"

The one sentence with no benign version.

What I was actually trying to say when I said it:

The version that describes the event rather than their reaction:

What I want to happen next, put as a request:

5. Six hours without replying

Silence carries information you did not intend to send.

My actual pattern of when I am reachable:

Have I ever told them that pattern out loud?

The one line I could send before a long gap:

What I am not willing to change about my phone use:

6. "It is not a big deal"

An instruction to have a smaller feeling.

The last time I said a version of this:

What I still think about the size of it:

The question I could ask instead of the verdict:

7. Your own two, from this week

Two of your own, translated the same way.

Sentence one, as I said it:

What I think arrived:

The rewrite, with a time or a next contact in it:

Sentence two, as I said it:

What arrived, and my rewrite:

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