Before you say yes

Choose a phrase that sounds like you. Change the wording, timing, or amount of detail to fit the situation. You can start with one.

Give yourself time

- “Let me check my schedule and energy before I answer.”
- “I need some time to think. I'll get back to you tomorrow.”
- “I'm not ready to decide while we're talking.”
- “I need the details in writing before I can commit.”

Decline or offer less

- “Thank you for thinking of me. I can't do that this week.”
- “I'm going to pass this time.”
- “I can help for half an hour, but I can't stay all afternoon.”
- “I don't have room for another commitment right now.”

Change an earlier yes

- “I said yes too quickly. I need to change my answer.”
- “I checked my week, and I can't take this on after all.”
- “I can still help with this part, but I can't do the whole thing.”
- “The plan has changed, and this no longer works for me.”

Set limits with yourself

- “I am done working for today. I'll write down where to start tomorrow.”
- “I need to eat before I take on anything else.”
- “I can save this idea without starting it tonight.”
- “I'm pausing this purchase until I've checked my budget.”

Make the pause easier to remember

Save one phrase in your phone or put it somewhere visible. Use the pause to check your time, energy, and existing commitments.

Protect your time and energy

Your limit can protect rest, attention, comfort, or recovery. Some boundaries are the actions you take, even when there is little to explain.

Rest and capacity

- “I need a quiet evening, so I'm staying home.”
- “I can come for an hour. Then I'm heading home.”
- “I'm keeping Sunday morning free to recover.”
- “I don't have the attention for a long conversation tonight.”

Sensory and body needs

- “I'm getting overloaded. I'm going somewhere quieter.”
- “I'm going to take a break from the noise.”
- “I'm more comfortable without a hug. I'll wave hello.”
- “I don't want to be touched right now.”

Digital availability

- “I usually don't reply to messages after eight.”
- “I'm turning off notifications while I work.”
- “I'm taking a break from this group chat.”
- “I'm not comfortable sharing my location.”

Focus and predictability

- “I'm finishing this task before I switch to something else.”
- “I need a little time to transition. I can talk in ten minutes.”
- “I can't commit to last-minute plans today.”
- “If plans change, I'll need to check whether I can still come.”

Build support around the boundary

A reminder, calendar block, quieter space, or change to your notifications can help you follow the limit you have chosen.

Boundaries in relationships

You may want connection and still need limits on your time, availability, or what you share. Choose words that fit the relationship.

With family

- “I can visit on Saturday, but I can't stay overnight.”
- “I can bring a dish, but I can't organize the whole gathering.”
- “I'm not available for unplanned visits. Please check with me first.”
- “I'm keeping that decision private for now.”

With friends

- “I'd like to see you. A short walk works better for me this week.”
- “I can listen for ten minutes, and then I need to stop.”
- “I can't be available throughout the day. I'll check in when I have time.”
- “I'm going home now. I'd like to see you another day.”

With a partner

- “I'm getting overloaded. I need a break. Can we try again in twenty minutes?”
- “I can talk after dinner, once I've had some time alone.”
- “I want to talk about this, but I can't do it while we're shouting.”
- “I'm keeping Thursday evening for my own interests.”

Money, belongings, privacy

- “I'm not able to lend money.”
- “I'm keeping that item for my own use.”
- “I'm not discussing my body or weight.”
- “I'm not sharing my passwords.”

Offer only what you can actually give

You can explain a need without sharing every personal detail. Offer a different time or option only if it really works for you.

Hold the limit you chose

A request asks someone to cooperate. Your boundary is the part you control: what you will do, take on, discuss, or step away from.

At work

- “My current workload is full. Let's decide what would need to move.”
- “I can finish this by Friday. If it needs to be sooner, let's review the priorities.”
- “I check work messages during my agreed working hours.”
- “I need uninterrupted time for this. I'll be available after two.”

Emotional responsibility

- “I care about you, and I can't make this decision for you.”
- “I can't provide all the support you need. I can talk for ten minutes today.”
- “I'm not going to pass messages between the two of you.”
- “I'm at capacity. I can't take responsibility for this.”

When someone pushes back

- “I understand you're disappointed. I'm still not available.”
- “I've given you my answer, and it hasn't changed.”
- “I don't have anything else to add.”
- “I'm not going to keep discussing this.”

Follow through with action

- “If the conversation becomes insulting, I'm going to end it.”
- “This is becoming insulting. I'm ending the call now.”
- “I've said I won't discuss this. I'm changing the subject.”
- “I'm stepping away now. We can try again when we're ready to speak respectfully.”

Choose a boundary that fits your situation

Power, responsibilities, and safety can affect your options. You may need a different approach or support before acting on a boundary.