

Pausing Before a Difficult Reply

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Prepare a brief pause and a clear plan for a difficult reply.

When a message or conversation activates a strong feeling, a brief pause may create room to choose your response. Use this page with a recent example or before a conversation. A pause works best when you have a plan to return.

Notice your early cue

Look for a sign you can recognize before responding, such as typing faster, clenching your jaw, interrupting, or going quiet. Choose a pause that fits the setting: place the phone down, take a sip of water, look around, or ask for a short break.

Return with a purpose

Decide what you want your reply to accomplish. You might clarify, express a need, set a limit, or postpone until a specific time. For example, "I want to answer carefully. Can we return to this after dinner?" Follow through when it is safe and appropriate.

The situation and my earliest sign of activation

A pause I can actually use in this setting

What I want my response to accomplish

The words I will use and my plan for returning