When You Think Someone Is Upset With You

A little room between what happened and what it might mean

A reply takes longer than usual, or someone seems quieter with you. Before you know it, you are replaying the conversation and wondering what you did wrong.

These questions can help you separate what you noticed from what you fear it means, then decide whether there is something useful to ask.

You'll need: A pen, a few quiet minutes and one recent situation you would like to understand.

1. Notice the moment. What happened? "They haven't answered my message" tells you something different from "They are angry with me."

2. Listen to your own reaction. What are you worried this means? Are you feeling hurt, anxious, embarrassed or something else? Naming the feeling may help you understand what is making this moment difficult.

3. Make room for what you do not know. What makes you think they are upset? Is there something you may be missing? You do not have to decide that everything is fine; you can simply leave the question open.

4. Choose your next step. Is there a plan to confirm, something specific to apologize for, or a conversation to ask about? If not, you may be able to leave the message alone for now.

For example

You texted a friend about dinner and have not heard back. You wonder whether they are annoyed that you changed the restaurant. You do not know that, but you do need to plan your evening. You send: "Are we still meeting at six? Could you let me know by four so I can plan?" You have asked about dinner without treating your worry as a fact.

A helpful reminder

Sometimes there is something to address, and sometimes you will not know yet. If a hurtful comment or action did happen, you can take it seriously. This page is a chance to sort through uncertainty, not talk yourself out of what you know.

Learn more: NHS: Reframing unhelpful thoughts

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Your planning page

Use this page to make a few notes. You do not need to fill every space.

1. What did I notice?

Describe what happened before deciding what it means.

2. What am I afraid it means? How am I feeling?

Give the thought and the feeling their own space.

3. What do I know, and what might I be missing?

You can leave some questions unanswered.

4. What would be a useful next step?

Write one clear message if needed, or note what you will return to while you wait.

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