

Not Tonight

The first page, free: Instead of sending the text

kept in drafts

INSTEAD OF

sending the text

For when the message is typed and your thumb is over his name.

What this urge is

You're not being weak, and you're not about to do something terrible. You're about to do something very human.

His silence is landing in your body like an emergency. Sending the message looks like the exit, because for a few seconds after you press send, the pressure really does drop.

Then the waiting starts. One hour of relief tends to cost about three days of checking your phone.

The message itself is probably good. That isn't the question tonight. The question is whether you're choosing to send it, or whether the hour is choosing for you.

Urges like this usually rise, peak and fall inside about twenty minutes if nothing feeds them. You only need to get through the first ten.

The ten-minute hold

Set a ten-minute timer now.

0–2 **Park it.**

Copy the message. Paste it into your notes, under today's date. Then clear the text box in his chat and close the chat. You haven't deleted what you wrote. It just isn't one tap from sending any more.

2–5 **Body first.**

Stand up. Put the phone face down across the room. Run cold water over your wrists for thirty seconds. Then breathe out for longer than you breathe in, six times: in for four, out for six. You're not trying to feel calm. You're telling your body there's no fire.

5–8 **Read it like a friend sent it.**

Open the note, not the chat. Read your message once, as if your closest friend had written it and asked, "should I send this?" Then finish this sentence: *"What I'm really asking him for is _____."* It's usually one of four things: an answer, reassurance, proof that I mattered, or just contact. Has he been able to give you that? Who or what could give you a little of it tonight instead?

8–10 **Decide for tonight only.**

You're not deciding forever. Say it: *"Not tonight."* Set an alarm for 10 a.m. called "the message". If you still want to send it then, in daylight, after one reread, that's your call and nobody else's. Now charge the phone somewhere that isn't your bed.

If it's still loud

Run the timer once more and repeat steps two and three. Second rounds are normal.

If you already sent it

You haven't undone anything. Don't send a second message to fix the first. Turn to *Instead of rereading what you sent*.

One line to keep

The urge is real. It isn't an instruction.

Seven more pages

This was the first of eight Instead Pages from **Not Tonight**. The others are for his story, the old chat, his "hey", the last talk, the post meant for him, the morning after, and the "I was too much" spiral.

The full guide also has fourteen short chapters on what his distance often means, and what it doesn't.

No promises about him. A plan for you tonight.

Self-help, not therapy. If he frightened, threatened or controlled you, please use the support lines on the next page.

Support lines

This guide is self-help. It isn't a substitute for therapy or medical care.

If you're in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.

If he frightened, threatened, hurt or controlled you:

- To find a helpline in your country: **findahelpline.com**
- United States: National Domestic Violence Hotline, **1-800-799-7233**, thehotline.org
- United Kingdom: National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Refuge), **0808 2000 247**
- India: Women Helpline, **181**

If you're having thoughts of harming yourself:

- findahelpline.com lists crisis lines by country.
- United States: call or text **988**.

If you're not in crisis but you're struggling to function for more than a couple of weeks (not sleeping, not eating, unable to work), please talk to a doctor or a therapist. That isn't an overreaction. It's what they're for.

You bought a guide about an ex. If what you needed turned out to be one of these numbers, that's all right. Call it.