



When Someone I Love Is Withdrawing

How to stay present without crowding, blaming, or disappearing

Withdrawal can have many meanings

A person may need quiet, be overwhelmed, feel ashamed, be depressed or grieving, fear conflict, lack words, experience burnout or illness, or feel unsafe. Silence does not tell you which explanation is true. Offer a path to connection while respecting boundaries and checking safety when there are concerning changes.

Try support that lowers pressure

Instead of	Try
Why are you ignoring me?	I have noticed you have been quieter. I care about you. No pressure to explain.
Sending many messages	Send one warm, clear message and say when you will check again.
Let me know if you need anything.	Offer a choice: food at the door, a ride, a short call, quiet company, or space.
Giving advice immediately	Ask: Do you want listening, ideas, practical help, or distraction?
Taking silence as rejection	Hold multiple possibilities and care for your own feelings elsewhere.
Surprising them at home	Ask before visiting unless there is a credible immediate safety concern.
Demanding personal details	Respect privacy while asking direct safety questions when needed.
Doing everything for them	Support one step without taking over choices they can make.
Keeping a secret about immediate danger	Contact crisis or emergency help when safety cannot be maintained.

Check more directly when the change is new or concerning

- They talk about wanting to die, being a burden, having no reason to live, or feeling trapped.
- They say goodbye, give away important belongings, seek lethal means, or make a plan.
- Substance use, agitation, recklessness, rage, despair, sleep changes, or isolation sharply increase.
- They stop essential medication, food, hydration, child care, or medical care.
- There is violence, coercive control, stalking, psychosis, confusion, or inability to care for basic safety.

Ask plainly

I care about you, and I want to ask directly: Are you thinking about suicide? Do you have a plan or access to what you would use? Can you stay safe right now? Asking directly does not plant the idea. Listen without judgment and connect to help.

A low-pressure message

You do not need to respond today. I care about you. I can bring dinner Tuesday, sit quietly for twenty minutes, or give you space and text Friday. If none of those help, you can send me one word for what would.

Safety

Call or text 988 for guidance for yourself or a loved one. If there is immediate danger, a suicide attempt in progress, or a medical emergency, call 911. Do not manage serious risk alone.