



# ND Communication Cheatsheet

*Phrases that help you express needs without over-explaining or apologising.*

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## **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

## A steady orientation

This is not a script you have to follow perfectly.  
It's not about sounding confident, polished, or "professional."  
It's not here to make you easier for other people.

This cheatsheet exists because many neurodivergent people:

- explain too much to be believed
- apologise to stay safe
- give reasons when a boundary would do
- get overwhelmed trying to find the *right* words

The phrases here are **permission-based shortcuts...** language that reduces effort, emotional labour, and nervous system strain.

You can copy, adapt, shorten, or ignore any of these.  
You don't need to justify using them.  
You're allowed to sound brief.

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## 1. A key reframe before using any of this

You are not required to:

- prove your needs
- disclose your reasons
- make your boundary palatable
- manage other people's feelings

Clear communication is not rudeness.  
Brevity is not coldness.  
Needing support is not an inconvenience.

This cheatsheet prioritises **clarity over explanation.**

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## 2. When you need time (without apologising)

You don't need to rush to be respectful.

You might say:

- "I need some time to think about this."
- "I'm not ready to decide yet."
- "Can I come back to this later?"
- "I need to pause before responding."

- “I’ll need more time than usual.”

If it helps to set expectation:

- “I’ll come back to this tomorrow.”
- “I’ll respond after I’ve had time to process.”

Time is a legitimate need... not a failure to engage.

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### 3. When you need clarity or predictability

Asking for clarity is not being difficult.

You might say:

- “Can you clarify what’s expected here?”
- “What does ‘done’ look like?”
- “Can you be more specific?”
- “I need this broken down.”
- “What’s the priority?”

For tone or context:

- “Is this feedback or information?”
- “Is this urgent, or can it wait?”
- “Can you put that in writing?”

Clarity reduces nervous system load.  
You don’t need to apologise for asking for it.

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### 4. When something feels overwhelming

You don’t have to explain *why* it’s overwhelming.

You might say:

- “This is a bit much for me right now.”
- “I’m overloaded.”
- “I can’t take this on at the moment.”
- “I need to reduce what I’m holding.”
- “My capacity is limited today.”

If you want to name what helps:

- “I need fewer inputs.”

- “I need this simplified.”
- “I need to do one thing at a time.”

Overwhelm is information... not an excuse.

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## 5. When you need a boundary (clean, not harsh)

Boundaries don't need reasons to be valid.

You might say:

- “I'm not able to do that.”
- “That doesn't work for me.”
- “I need to say no to this.”
- “I'm not available for that.”
- “I can't commit to that.”

If you want to keep it relational:

- “I appreciate the ask, but I'm not able to.”
- “I'm going to pass on this.”

You do not need to soften a boundary with self-criticism.

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## 6. When you need to change plans

Changing your mind is allowed.

You might say:

- “I need to revise my plan.”
- “I can't do this as originally agreed.”
- “I need to adjust expectations.”
- “I'm realising I don't have capacity for this.”

You are not unreliable for responding to updated information... including information from your body.

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## 7. When you need support (without over-explaining)

You don't need a crisis to ask for help.

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You might say:

- “I need some support with this.”
- “Can you help me think this through?”
- “I’m stuck and need assistance.”
- “I can’t do this alone.”

If you know what kind of help:

- “I need help prioritising.”
- “I need practical support.”
- “I need reassurance, not solutions.”

Asking clearly is not asking too much.

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## 8. When you need to step away or disengage

You don’t need permission to regulate.

You might say:

- “I need to step away for a bit.”
- “I need a break from this conversation.”
- “I’m not able to continue right now.”
- “I’ll come back when I’m more regulated.”

You are allowed to leave *before* things escalate.

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## 9. When feedback or tone is hard to process

You don’t need to absorb everything instantly.

You might say:

- “I need time to process this feedback.”
- “Can we pause this conversation?”
- “I’m having a strong reaction and need space.”
- “I’ll come back to this once I’ve settled.”

Processing later is not avoidance.  
It’s regulation-first communication.

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## 10. When you want to reduce emotional labour

You are not required to explain your inner world on demand.

You might say:

- “I don’t want to go into details.”
- “I’m not comfortable explaining more.”
- “I’m keeping this brief on purpose.”
- “That’s all I want to share right now.”

Privacy is not secrecy.  
It’s a boundary.

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## 11. When you’re tempted to over-apologise

Apologies are for harm... not for needs.

Instead of:

“Sorry, I’m being difficult / slow / dramatic...”

You might try:

- “Thank you for your patience.”
- “I need a bit more time.”
- “I’m going to do this differently.”

Gratitude often communicates care **without self-erasure**.

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## 12. When you need to name limits clearly

Limits help others orient... they’re not confrontational.

You might say:

- “I can do X, but not Y.”
- “I have capacity for part of this.”
- “I can help briefly.”
- “I can revisit this later.”

Partial availability is still availability.

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## 13. When you don't have words (but need to communicate)

It's okay to say less.

You might say:

- "I don't have the words right now."
- "I need to communicate minimally."
- "I'm not ignoring this... I'm regulating."

Silence with context is communication.

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## 14. A note on tone (especially important)

You do not need to:

- sound cheerful
- justify your neutrality
- perform warmth to be understood

A calm, direct tone is not rude.  
It's often the **least dysregulating option**.

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## 15. Choosing phrases that fit you

You are allowed to:

- shorten these further
- change the wording
- script them in advance
- use the same phrase repeatedly

Consistency can be regulating.

You don't need to personalise every boundary.

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## 16. A simple personal shortlist (optional)

It can help to choose **3–5 phrases** that feel natural and keep them handy.

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For example:

- “I need time to process.”
- “I don’t have capacity for that.”
- “Can you clarify expectations?”
- “I need to step away.”
- “I’ll come back to this later.”

You don’t need a perfect sentence in the moment.  
You need a **reliable one**.

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## 17. What this cheatsheet is *not* asking you to do

It’s not asking you to:

- be assertive all the time
- confront everyone
- explain less than feels safe
- override fear or trauma

It’s offering **language that costs less...**  
so communication doesn’t drain you further.

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### A closing permission

You are allowed to communicate:

- briefly
- imperfectly
- without justification
- without apology

Needing less language is not a deficit.  
It’s an access need.

You don’t owe anyone your nervous system.

Use what fits.  
Leave the rest.