

WORDS FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Transition Statements

Addressing workplace & sexual harassment

Practical language to redirect inappropriate conversations, establish professional boundaries, and seek support.

Developed by Dr. Kortney Peagram

Your safety comes first.

You do not have to find the perfect words, confront someone, or give a warning before seeking help or reporting a concern.

CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT FITS YOUR SITUATION

YELLOW / Set a boundary

When it feels safe to speak:
redirect the conversation or clearly ask
for the behavior to stop.

RED / Prioritize safety

When you feel unsafe:
leave if you can, seek support, and
report the concern.

These colors organize response options; they do not measure seriousness or determine whether conduct is harassment. You can seek support at any point.

YELLOW ZONE

Clear. Calm. Direct.

Choose words that fit your communication style. A short statement can be enough; you do not owe a lengthy explanation.

Redirect the conversation

"Let's keep this conversation work-related."

"I don't want to discuss my personal life at work."

"Let's return to the topic of the meeting."

Name the boundary

"Please use my name when referring to me."

"Please don't comment on my body or appearance."

"That comment is inappropriate. Please stop."

Decline unwanted attention

"No, I don't want to go out or get a drink."

"My answer is no. Please stop asking."

"I prefer a handshake. Please don't hug me."

Be more direct

"That sexual joke is inappropriate. Stop."

"Please don't touch me."

"I have asked you to stop. I am ending this conversation."

If someone says, "I was only joking..."

"I don't find it appropriate. Please don't repeat it."

RED ZONE

Leave. Get support.

If you feel threatened or unsafe, focus on getting to a safer place. You may leave without explaining or announcing a report.

End the interaction

"I am uncomfortable, and I am leaving."

"This conversation is over."

"I feel unsafe. I need you to leave."

Protect personal space

"Do not touch me or come any closer."

"Step back. I need space."

"Please keep the door open."

Ask for support

"I need help with a workplace concern. Can we speak privately?"

"I would like support before meeting with this person again."

"I want to report what happened and discuss next steps."

AFTER THE INTERACTION

01 Reach a safer place

Contact a trusted person, workplace security, or emergency services if there is immediate danger.

02 Record the details

Note the date, time, location, exact words or actions, and witnesses. Keep relevant messages secure.

03 Use a reporting channel

Contact HR or another designated reporting contact. Ask about next steps and follow-up.

PRACTICE & PREPARE

Find your words.

Choose two or three statements you can remember. Practice saying them aloud when you feel comfortable and safe.

01

My go-to boundary

What would I say to redirect or stop an inappropriate comment?

02

My exit statement

What could I say if I choose to end the interaction?

03

My support contact

Who can I contact, and where can I find the reporting process?

Respect is a shared responsibility.

These statements are tools, not obligations. Responsibility for inappropriate behavior belongs to the person engaging in it.

Adapted from Peagram Consulting's Transition Statements worksheet.
An educational communication resource; not a substitute for workplace reporting procedures.