

<p style="text-align: center;">Protective or Defensive Isolation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Driven by fear, overwhelm, or self-protection</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Genuine Desire for Solitude</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A conscious choice to be alone for self-care and reflection</i></p>
<p>Follows a triggering event: May pull away after conflict, perceived rejection, or feeling emotionally exposed</p>	<p>Communicated directly and calmly: Need to be alone is expressed without emotional intensity or defensiveness (e.g. “I love you, I just need a little space.”)</p>
<p>Sudden shift in connection: Were engaging before but now withdrawing abruptly</p>	<p>Part of a healthy routine: It’s part of a healthy routine. They regularly take time for themselves, not just after emotional distress. They see solitude as a way to recharge, not escape.</p>
<p>Push-pull dynamic: May send mixed signals, withdrawing but also wanting reassurance (e.g. hoping someone will reach out but acting distant when they do). May isolate but feel hurt or abandoned if no one checks in.</p>	<p>Return feeling rested, not distressed: After time alone, they re-engage in a way that feels natural and balanced. They don’t seem resentful or withdrawn when reconnecting.</p>
<p>Avoidance of vulnerability: Might say “I just don’t want to talk about it,” rather than, “I need some time for myself.”</p>	<p>No expectation or test involved: They aren’t waiting to see if others will reach out, prove their care, or read between the lines, and don’t seem upset if people respect their space.</p>
<p>There’s an underlying belief of being “too much” or unwanted: May isolate because they assume others don’t want them around, rather than because they actually prefer being alone. If asked, they might say things like, “You don’t really want to deal with me right now.”</p>	<p>Overall behavior is consistent: Not suddenly changing how they interact with others (e.g., ghosting, ignoring, or blocking people out of the blue). They maintain other areas of life (work, hobbies, self-care) rather than fully disengaging.</p>
<p>It feels heavy, lonely, or painful rather than restful: Isolation feels more like shutting down than a conscious choice to recharge. It might feel like being trapped. If they do open up, they might express feelings of loneliness, rejection, or self-blame.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Created by Stacie Fanelli, LCSW</i></p>