

Creating a Reactionary Gap

A “reactionary gap” is created by any tool, situation, or strategy that allows you to take a mindful pause or create a bit of “distance” with the goal of helping yourself make a more present, non-compulsive food choice. *It is not about whether you say “yes” or “no” to a food*, but about making a choice from a more peaceful, grounded place.

What a “reactionary gap” is:

- A tool or strategy for pausing and checking in with yourself, with the goal of making a more mindful, less conflicted eating choice
 - Wanting YOU to be in the “driver’s seat” of your eating choices
- Could be a way to check in emotionally, calm down physically, and/or practically orient your physical environment or routine
- A helpful boundary for intervening in the compulsivity with food
 - Not about whether you say yes or no; but about YOU feeling in charge of your choices
- Check in to consider how you are feeling physically and emotionally, knowing there are a number of factors that may go into your food decision



What a “reactionary gap” is NOT:

- A way to “unhealthfully restrict” eating
 - “Controlling” eating out of guilt tends to only backfire into MORE compulsive eating
- A way to pause to “always say no” to food



(Possible Check-In Questions)

Creating Unconditional Permission

Check in with yourself:
How am I feeling physically?
How am I feeling emotionally?
How would I like to feel?

If feeling anxious, overwhelmed, overly upset, feelings of urgency, etc. consider engaging in a moment of mindfulness to calm down a degree. Know that the option to eat the food still fully exists. The goal here is to choose or not choose from a more mindful, life-giving place.

Would I rather enjoy the food now, or later?
What might support how I'd like to feel physically, mentally, and emotionally?
What might my present, Healthy Self prefer to choose?
Is my choice coming from a place of freedom + satisfaction OR unhealthy restriction or chaotic compulsivity?
Do I feel like I am in the driver's seat with this choice? (Or is fear, shame, guilt, or compulsivity driving things?)

Examples of Reactionary Gaps:

In the dining hall:

- Journaling or texting a support person before heading down, or after a first round of food
- Physically leaving the dining hall after a first round of food (knowing you can always go back later)
- Getting up and using the bathroom after a first round of food, doing some mindful breathing and walking through your check-in questions

In your dorm room:

- Not keeping your most triggering snacks in your dorm room, knowing you are free to walk to the convenience store at any time to get them
- Journaling or texting/calling a support person as soon as you can if you start to feel a binge/compulsive eating urge come on

At a restaurant:

- Placing your fork down midway through the meal and doing a mini check-in
- If with a spouse/partner or trusted friend/family member, pausing midway through to walk through a mini check-in

In your kitchen:

- Not keeping snacks on the counter, knowing you are always free to get them out of the pantry if you'd like
- Choosing to eat when you are seated at the table, if you find yourself compulsively eating when standing

Note: These serve merely as examples. Please note that some examples may feel too restrictive or still-too-compulsive to you, depending on your specific compulsive dynamic.

Note: We need to be able to “freely say yes to a food” without guilt in order to also “freely say no.” A reactionary gap is not about “saying no,” but about creating distance to make a more peaceful, less compulsive choice.