

10 Phrases for the Hard Moments

For when your kid is losing it and your brain goes blank

STEP 0 **You first.** 3 slow breaths before you open your mouth.

Quick reminder: your kid isn't out to get you. They're having a really rough time.

You can't help them calm down if you're still wound up yourself. Breathe first. Talk second.

FOR FEELINGS *let them feel it first*

- **"I can see you're really upset right now."**
Just say what you see. That alone takes the edge off.
- **"It's okay to cry. Crying helps your body calm down."**
Let them cry. Seriously. Telling them to stop just drags it out.
- **"You wish you could have that. I understand."**
You're not saying yes. You're saying 'I get it.' Those are different things.

FOR CONNECTION *get close before you correct*

- **"I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."**
Sometimes they just need to know you didn't leave. That's it.
- **"Do you want a hug or some space?"**
Let them pick. When everything feels out of control, one tiny choice helps.
- **"I love you even when you're angry."**
Say it out loud even if it feels awkward. They need this one the most right now.
- **"When you're ready, I'm here to help."**
Don't hover. Don't push. Just wait. They'll come to you.

FOR LIMITS WITH LOVE *firm but not mean*

- **"I won't let you hit. I'll keep everyone safe."**
You can be gentle AND clear at the same time. That's the whole point.
- **"You can be mad AND use gentle hands."**
The feeling is fine. The hitting is not. Say both parts.
- **"Let's take 3 big breaths together."**
Don't just tell them to breathe. Do it with them. They'll copy you.

Print this & stick it on your fridge. You'll thank yourself on a Tuesday at 6 PM.

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Say This Instead

10 things we all say on autopilot, and what actually works better

ON AUTOPILOT...

Meltdowns

X "Stop crying!"

Falls

X "You're fine!"

Pushback

X "Because I said so!"

Risky play

X "Be careful!"

Acting out

X "You're being bad!"

Whining

X "Stop whining!"

Not sharing

X "Share right now!"

Fears

X "Don't be scared!"

Big anger

X "Go to your room!"

Overwhelm

X "What's wrong with you?"

WHAT WORKS BETTER...

> "It's okay to be sad. I'm right here."

> "Ouch. Show me where it hurts."

> "Here's why -- let me explain."

> "Hmm, do you see that edge?"

> "I don't love that choice. Try again?"

> "I want to help. Can you try that again?"

> "When you're done, it's her turn."

> "Yeah, that is kind of scary. I'm here."

> "Let's go find a quiet spot."

> "You're having a rough time, huh?"

You won't nail it every time. That's fine. Try again tomorrow.

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Emergency Scripts

3 worst-case scenarios. Brain gone blank? Just read this out loud.

When they're hitting or kicking you

DO THIS Get low. Don't stand over them. Gently catch their hands.

SAY THIS "I'm not going to let you hurt me. I'll keep us both safe."

AFTER "Your body had so much anger it had to do something. Next time, try stomping your feet."

WHY:

They honestly can't stop themselves at this age. They're not being bad -- they just don't have the brakes yet. Just block it. You can talk about it later.

When they're screaming on the floor

DO THIS Don't talk. Sit near them. Breathe loud enough for them to hear you.

SAY THIS Nothing yet. Wait it out. When the worst is over: "That was rough. I was here the whole time."

AFTER "You needed to get that out. Feeling better? Want some water?"

WHY:

Talking to a kid mid-meltdown is like yelling into wind. They literally cannot hear you right now. Just sit there. That's enough.

When they won't get dressed / eat / leave

DO THIS Drop your shoulders. Stand next to them, not across from them.

SAY THIS "Red shirt or blue shirt? You pick." Two options. Both fine by you.

IF STUCK Count to 10. "I'll pick today. You pick tomorrow." Keep moving. No lecture.

WHY:

It's not about the shirt. They just want some say in their day. Two choices is all it takes. Don't drag it out -- that makes it worse for both of you.

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to keep showing up.

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