



PARENTFLARE

# The 5 Scripts Every Parent Needs

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The exact words for the 5 hardest everyday parenting moments — backed by child development research.



Each script includes:

✓ What to say (word-for-word) ✓ Why it works (the science) ✓ What NOT to say

## SCRIPT 1

# When They Hit or Push

*Your child just hit their sibling, shoved a friend at the park, or smacked you. Your instinct is to yell. Here's what to say instead.*

### ✓ SAY THIS

**“I’m going to stop you. I won’t let you hit. You’re upset — I can see that. Let’s move over here. You can be mad, but I will keep everyone safe. Tell me what happened with your words.”**

### ■ WHY IT WORKS

Children hit because their emotional brain has overwhelmed their thinking brain. Physically stopping the action (calmly, not aggressively) establishes safety. Naming their emotion shows you see them. Offering an alternative (words instead of hitting) teaches the replacement behavior — which is the only thing that actually reduces hitting long-term.

### ✗ DON’T SAY THIS

**“We don’t hit! Say you’re sorry right now! How would you like it if someone hit you?”**

### ■ WHY NOT

Forced apologies teach kids to perform remorse, not feel it. And rhetorical questions ("how would you like it?") require perspective-taking, which children under 6 literally cannot do yet — their prefrontal cortex hasn't developed enough for that kind of abstract reasoning.

## SCRIPT 2

# When They Say "I Hate You"

*They look you in the eye and say the thing that cuts deepest. It stings. But here's the truth: this is a sign of attachment, not rejection.*

### ✓ SAY THIS

**"That's a big feeling. You don't have to like me right now. I'm still going to be right here. When you're ready, I'd like to hear what's really going on underneath that feeling."**

### ■ WHY IT WORKS

"I hate you" is almost never about hate. It's the biggest word they have for a feeling they can't articulate. By not reacting to the surface statement and instead naming it as a 'big feeling,' you teach them that emotions — even ugly ones — are safe to express. Saying 'I'm still here' reinforces secure attachment: your love is not conditional on their behavior.

### ✗ DON'T SAY THIS

**"That's a terrible thing to say! After everything I do for you? Go to your room until you can be nice."**

### ■ WHY NOT

Sending them away when they express a hard emotion teaches them that certain feelings make them unlovable. Kids who learn this either stop sharing feelings entirely (withdrawal) or escalate to bigger behaviors to test whether you really will leave.

### SCRIPT 3

## When They Refuse to Leave

*The park, the playdate, the grandparents' house. You say 'time to go' and they melt down, run away, or go boneless on the floor.*

### ✓ SAY THIS

**“We're leaving in two minutes. I know — leaving when you're having fun is really hard. Let's pick one last thing to do. What's your final activity? You choose... Okay, after that, we're going to walk to the car together. Do you want to hop like a bunny or stomp like a dinosaur on the way?”**

### ■ WHY IT WORKS

Transitions are one of the hardest things for young children because they have no concept of future reward. The two-minute warning respects their autonomy. Letting them choose the 'last thing' gives them control. The silly walk to the car redirects their brain from 'I don't want to leave' to 'which animal should I be?' — it's a bridge activity that makes the transition feel like part of the fun.

### ✗ DON'T SAY THIS

**“We're leaving NOW. I'm counting to three. One... two... If you don't come right now, we're never coming back!”**

### ■ WHY NOT

Countdown threats teach urgency through fear, not cooperation. And empty threats ('we're never coming back') erode trust when they inevitably aren't enforced. The child learns that your words don't match reality.

## SCRIPT 4

# When They Melt Down in Public

*Grocery store. Restaurant. Target. The full-volume, floor-level, everyone-is-staring meltdown. Here's how to survive it with dignity.*

### ✓ SAY THIS

**“I’m going to pick you up and we’re going to step outside for a minute. I know this is hard. Take a big breath with me. In through your nose... out through your mouth.”**

### ■ WHY IT WORKS

A dysregulated child cannot learn, listen, or reason. The first job is co-regulation — using your calm body to help them find calm. Moving to a quieter space reduces sensory input. Breathing together is the fastest way to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Everything else (the lesson, the apology) comes later, when their brain is back online.

### ✗ DON’T SAY THIS

**“Stop it! Everyone is looking at you! You’re embarrassing yourself.”**

### ■ WHY NOT

Shame amplifies dysregulation. A child in meltdown mode has zero access to their prefrontal cortex — the part that processes social awareness. Telling them people are watching adds fear to an already overwhelming moment.

## SCRIPT 5

# When They Won't Go to Bed

*Teeth are brushed. PJs are on. You've read the book. And now they need water, another hug, to tell you something, one more story... Here's how to hold the boundary with warmth.*

### ✓ SAY THIS

**“I know it’s hard to stop being awake. Your body needs rest even when your brain wants to keep going. Here’s the deal: I’ll sit right outside your door for five minutes. You don’t have to fall asleep — just let your body be still and see what happens.”**

### ■ WHY IT WORKS

Removing the pressure to 'fall asleep' paradoxically makes sleep come faster. Children resist bedtime partly because they fear separation and partly because 'go to sleep' feels like an impossible command. Saying 'just be still' gives them a task they can actually do. Staying nearby addresses the separation anxiety without getting pulled into endless negotiations.

### ✗ DON'T SAY THIS

**“If you get out of that bed one more time, there will be consequences!”**

### ■ WHY NOT

Threats activate the stress response — the exact opposite of what a child needs to fall asleep. A child whose cortisol is elevated from a threat will take longer to settle, creating a cycle where bedtime gets progressively worse each night.

## Want scripts for YOUR moment?

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