



Effortless Empathy

What Do I Say?

A Simple 3-Step Script for Moving From Big Feelings Back to

Problem-Solving



**FREE
PDF**



Acknowledge the feeling. Hold the boundary.
Build the bridge back.



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What Do I Say?

What comes next matters.

When Naming the Feeling Isn't Enough

Acknowledging a child's feelings can create connection. But connection alone may leave both of you standing in the same difficult moment.



Where scripts often stop:

- "You are disappointed."
- "You really wanted that."
- "You are feeling angry."



The missing bridge:

- A boundary
- Another perspective
- A choice or next action
- Responsibility or repair

Connect first. Then help the moment move somewhere.

Need help in a specific parenting moment?

This guide gives you a simple framework for knowing what to say. 30 Use the Moment cards go further, with complete guidance for 30 common parenting struggles-including what may be beneath the behavior, the boundary to hold, what to say now, and how to reflect later.

[Explore the 30 Use the Moment Cards](#)

Educational note: These tools support ordinary skill-building and are not a diagnosis or substitute for individualized professional care. Persistent, extreme, or unsafe behavior may require support from an appropriate qualified professional.



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What Do I Say?

The 3-Step Script



Connect

Acknowledge the experience

"You are feeling _____ because _____."

"You really wanted _____."



Extend

Create the bridge back

"It is okay to feel _____. It is not okay to _____."

"Now we need to _____."

"You can choose _____ or _____."



Reflect-Later

Notice the skill

"You were feeling _____, and you still managed to _____."

"What helped you?"

"What might you try next time?"

THE BOUNDARY DOES NOT DISAPPEAR

Understanding the feeling doesn't require changing the limit.



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What Do I Say When...

1

After You Say No

Connect

"You really wanted that. Hearing no is hard."

Extend

"The answer is still no, but I'll help you get through being upset. Would you like to sit near me, or would you like to have a little space?"

Reflect-Later

"You were very disappointed, but you got through it. What helped your body begin to settle?"

2

Your Child Refuses

Connect

"You do not want to stop what you were doing."

Extend

"It still needs to happen. Would you like to start by yourself, or would you like me to help you begin?"

Reflect-Later

"You did not feel like doing it, but you got started. That is how responsibility grows."



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What Do I Say When...

3

When Screen Time Ends

Connect

"You were really enjoying that, and stopping feels hard."

Extend

"The time is up. You can turn it off, or I will help. Then you can choose whether to get a drink or help me start the next thing."

Reflect-later

"You were upset when screen time ended, but you moved on. What helped you make the switch?"

4

When Plans Suddenly Change

Connect

"You were counting on that plan. This is not what you expected."

Extend

"We can't do the original plan today. Let's find one part we can keep—or choose what happens next."

Reflect-Later

"The plan changed, and you adjusted. What helped you move from what was supposed to happen to what we could do instead?"



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What Do I Say When...

5

When Your Child Ignores You

Connect

Move close and say, "You were focused on what you were doing. I need your attention now, please."

Extend

State one clear request. When possible, offer a limited start choice: "Shoes on now or when this two-minute timer ends?"

Reflect-later

"What helped you notice the request and get started without several reminders?"

Use Only What the Moment Can Hold

These scripts are building blocks, not speeches. When emotions are high, use fewer words: acknowledge the feeling, hold the boundary, and help everyone become safe.

Extend when your child can receive it. Reflect later, when they are able to think and learn.

You don't need to say everything perfectly. You only need to help the moment move somewhere useful.

The Bridge-Back Cheat Sheet

Choose What Comes Next

After you connect, ask what kind of help the moment needs.

1

A Firm Limit

"It's OK to feel it. It's not OK to.____"

2

Help Moving Forward

"What's one thing we need to do?"

3

A Manageable Choice

"Would you like to____or____?"

4

Perspective

"What might the other person be experiencing?"

5

Responsibility

"What part belongs to you?"

6

Repair

"What could help make this right?"

7

Problem-solving

"What's one solution we could try?"

THE GOAL IS NOT TO END THE FEELING

The goal is to help your child move through it and practice what comes next.

See the Full Example.

You've Seen What to Say.
Now See the Whole Moment.

Earlier, you saw the quick Connect–Extend–Reflect response for **After You Say No**—the first example in this guide.

Here's what that same situation looks like inside the 30 **Use the Moment** Cards—with what may be beneath the behavior, the boundary clarified, and the moment connected to the skills your child will need later as an adult.



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Use The Moment
Parenting Moment Card

Category: **Big Feelings & Self-Regulation**
Experience Type: **Limit, Parent-Child**

1 After You Say No

The Moment

Your child melts down after being told no.

Look Beneath The Behavior

Disappointment may be overwhelming your child's ability to shift from what they wanted to what is happening now. The missing skill may be recovery.



The Boundary

The answer remains no. Stop unsafe behavior and use as few words as necessary.



Connect

"You really wanted that. Hearing no is hard."
Name the disappointment without changing the decision or debating it.



Extend - The Bridge Back

"The answer is still no, but I'll help you get through being upset. Would you like to sit near me, or would you like to have a little space?"
Offer a concrete next step. A highly upset child may not be ready to invent a solution.



Reflect - Later

"You were very disappointed, but you got through it. What helped your body begin to settle?"

Life Skills

Emotional regulation
Disappointment tolerance
Flexibility

Parent Reminder

Understanding
disappointment does not
require changing the
limit.

Adult Bridge

Adults hear no, face limits,
cope with disappointment
without losing their ability
to move forward.



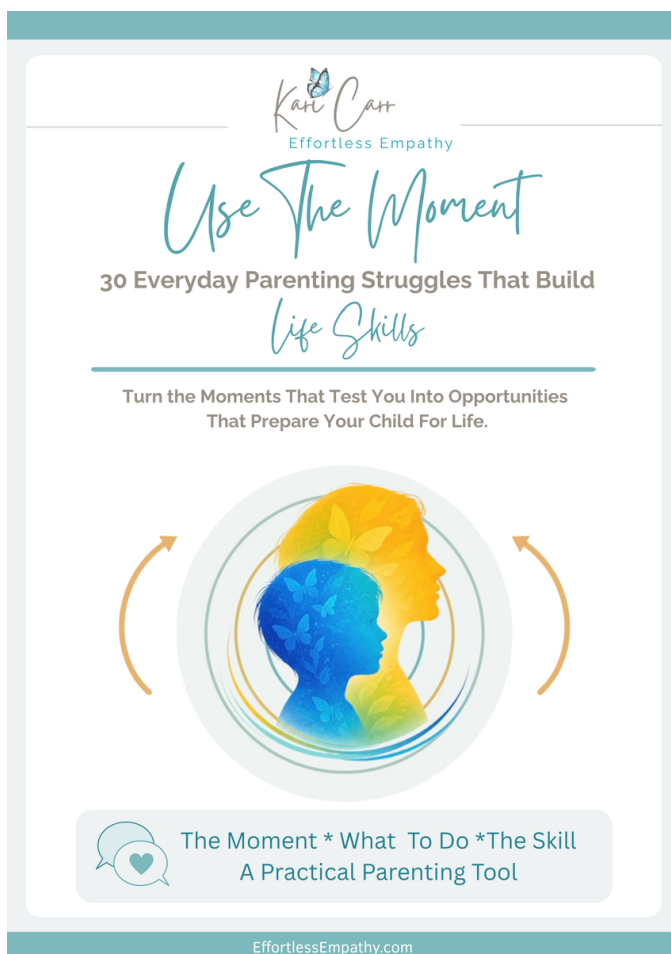
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30 Use The Moment Cards

Stop fixing the meltdown. Start using it...

Turn Everyday Parenting Struggles Into Life-Skill-Building Moments With a Repeatable 3-Step Method.

**Without becoming a stricter parent—
or pretending to be more patient than you feel.**



Each card includes:

- What may be beneath the behavior
- The boundary to hold
- Connect, Extend, & Reflect guidance
- Life Skills & Parent Reminder
- The Adult Bridge

You shouldn't have to invent the right response in the middle of a difficult moment.

The **30 Use the Moment Cards** give you practical, ready-to-use guidance for 30 common parenting struggles.

Here's what's covered:

- Big Feelings & Self-Regulation
- Limits, Transitions & Cooperation
- Sibling & Peer Conflict
- Responsibility & Independence
- Honesty, Mistakes & Repair
- Communication, Boundaries & Social Challenges

Get the Use The Moment Cards



**Stop trying to end the moment.
Start using it instead.**