WHAT TO SAY WHEN

KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO SAY DURING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILD... WITHOUT MAKING THINGS WORSE OR GETTING IT WRONG



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A complete guide that grows with you.
Every script. Every situation. Every age and stage.

Respond with calm confidence to build deep connections with your child even in the most challenging coparenting environments.

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Introduction

This guide is designed to support you at **every stage of your child's life.**

For **any situation.** For **any age.**

It will take you from **second guessing** your words, **worrying about getting it wrong**, and holding back in difficult moments...to feeling **calm, clear, and confident** in how you respond --> **building stronger, safer connections with your child.**

When your child comes to you with something difficult, the hardest part is often knowing what to say.

This guide is here to give you those words.

Simple, clear language you can use in the moment, without overthinking it.

Why language matters

The words you use shape how your child understands what they are experiencing.

Clear, calm language helps them feel safe, make sense of things, and not take on what isn't theirs.

How to use this guide

You don't need to read this guide from start to finish.

Use it as and when you need it.

Come to the section that fits what's happening, find the words that feel right, and use them
in your own way.

You can adapt anything to suit **your child, your voice, and your situation.**

If you're ever unsure what to say, come back to your core messages.
They work in most situations and help bring things back to what matters.

Looking ahead

As children grow, their understanding deepens.

At some point, especially as they move into their teenage years, it can be helpful to **talk more openly about what they are seeing.**

To **understand patterns, recognise behaviours,** and begin to **name what feels healthy and what doesn't.**

For younger children, this can be explained more simply.
You might describe behaviour as:

🐢 Smooth (like a tortoise)	🦔 Spiky (like a hedgehog)
Calm, kind, predictable	Sharp, confusing, or uncomfortable

This gives them a way to notice how behaviour feels, without needing to understand everything straight away.

Over time, this builds into a deeper understanding.

One that helps them recognise what feels right, what doesn't, and what they deserve.

The Three Things Your Child Always Needs to Hear

When things feel **confusing, overwhelming, or difficult,** your child doesn't need lots of explanations.

These are the **three most important messages** you can come back to, in any situation, at any age:

1

This is not your fault. You are not to blame.

2

You are not responsible for anyone else's happiness, only your own.

3

There is nothing you could do or say that would stop me from loving you. I love you forever and always.

If you ever feel unsure what to say, start here.

These messages work across all ages and all situations.

A Note on What to Avoid

When your child comes to you with information or questions about adult situations, **it can feel natural to want to explain, correct, or defend.**

But **more information doesn't always help.**
In fact, it can sometimes make things feel more confusing or heavier for your child.

Try to avoid:

- sharing **detailed explanations** or **adult information**
- telling your **full version of events**
- **correcting every part** of what they've been told
- saying **"that's not true"** or "they're lying"
- **criticising or blaming** the other parent
- **asking lots of questions** to get more information
- putting your child in the position of working things out

Instead, focus on:

- keeping things **simple**
- **reducing worry**
- **removing responsibility** from your child
- helping them **feel safe** and reassured

At their core, your child needs to know:

- they are **not to blame**
- they are **not responsible**
- they are **loved unconditionally**

When You Don't Know What to Say Yet

What might be happening

Sometimes your child will say something that catches you off guard.

You might not have the full picture yet. You might feel unsure, emotional, or even a little triggered yourself...and in that moment, it can feel like you need to respond straight away.

You don't.

You don't need to have the perfect words immediately to support your child well.
In fact, taking a moment is often the most helpful thing you can do.

What your child might say

"Why did they say that?"
"Is that true?"
"Why are they like that?"
"I don't understand"

What to say

Ages 3–5

- "That's a really important question"
- "I'm really glad you told me"
- "I'm going to have a little think about that"
- "We'll talk about it together soon"

Ages 6–9

- "That sounds really confusing"
- "I'm really glad you told me"
- "I want to think about this properly so I can explain it in the best way for you"
- "I'm going to come back to you and we'll talk about it together"

Ages 10+

- "That's a really important question, and I don't want to rush the answer"
- "I'm glad you told me"
- "I'm going to take a bit of time to think about how to explain this clearly"
- "We'll come back to it and go through it together"

If you feel unsure, come back to your core messages

1
This is not your fault. You are not to blame.

2
You are not responsible for anyone else's happiness, only your own.

3
There is nothing you could do or say that would stop me from loving you. I love you forever and always.

Mix in the core messages...for example:

"I'm really glad you told me this. I just want you to know... there's nothing you could ever do that would stop me loving you. I'm going to have a little think about this, and then we'll come back and talk about it together."

How long should you take?

Try to come back to the conversation:

- later the same day where possible
- or within 24 hours

You **don't need to rush**, but it's important not to leave your child waiting too long.

Reassurance for you

It's okay to pause.

You don't need to have the answer straight away.

Taking a moment often protects your child more than rushing into the wrong words.

Why this helps

Pausing gives you time to **respond calmly instead of reacting quickly.**

It helps your child feel heard and safe, and it builds trust that you will come back and support them properly.

Coming Back to the Conversation

What to say

Ages 3–5

- “Do you remember what you asked me before?”
- “I’ve had a little think about it”
- “We can talk about it together now”

Ages 6–9

- “I’ve been thinking about what you said earlier”
- “I’m ready to talk about it now if you are”
- “We can figure it out together”

Ages 10+

- “I’ve had some time to think about what you asked me earlier”
- “I’m ready to talk it through properly now”
- “Let’s go through it together

If they’re not ready to talk

- “That’s okay, we don’t have to talk right now”
- “We can come back to it later”
- “I’m here whenever you feel ready”

Reassurance for you

You don’t need to get the timing perfect.

Coming back calmly matters more than saying it exactly right the first time.

When You Want to Start a Conversation

What to say

Ages 3–5

- “I noticed you went a bit quiet earlier”
- “Is there anything you want to tell me?”
- “You can always tell me things”
- “You don’t have to talk now. We can talk later if you want to”

Ages 6–9

- “I noticed you went a bit quiet when we were talking earlier”
- “Is there anything you’ve been thinking about lately?”
- “You seemed a little quieter today — I might be wrong though”
- “Can I check in with you about something?”
- “You don’t have to talk now, but I’m here if you want to later”

Ages 10+

- “Would it be okay if we talked about something for a minute?”
- “I’ve got something in mind…is now a good time?”
- “I had a little thought earlier…”
- “Something popped into my head — can I tell you about it?”
- “If there’s anything on your mind, you can always tell me”

Reassurance for you

You don’t need to get it exactly right.

What matters most is creating a space where your child feels able to talk when they’re ready.

Before the Transition

Keep this simple.

This is not the moment to solve everything or reassure them that things will be fine.

Instead, focus on what you can control... your presence, your consistency, and what happens when they come back.

What your child might say

- “Do I have to go?”
- “Why do I have to go?”

What to say

You can **explain the situation in a simple, child-friendly way, without making promises.**

Ages 3–5

- “I’ll be here when you come back”

Ages 6–9

- “You might feel lots of different things, and that’s okay”
- “You can always tell me how things went when you’re home”

Ages 10+

- “It’s okay if you have mixed feelings about going”
- “You don’t have to handle everything on your own”
- “When you’re back, we can talk about anything you want to”

Explaining the plan

- This is the plan we have right now”
- “This is how things are working at the moment”

You can also say:

- “If you’d like, we can talk to them about the plan”
- “I can’t promise anything will change, but we can always talk about it”

After the Transition

When your child comes back, keep your **language light and neutral.**

Even if you've missed them, avoid saying things that might make them feel guilty for going or enjoying their time.

What to say

Ages 3–5

- "It's nice to have you back"
- "Do you want a cuddle?"
- "What did you get up to?"

Ages 6–9

- "I'm glad you're home"
- "How was your time?"
- "Was there anything that felt a bit tricky?"

Ages 10+

- "I'm glad you're back"
- "How was your time?"
- "Is there anything you've been thinking about since you got back?"

When Your Child Says They Don't Want to Go

What your child might say

- "I don't want to go"
- "Can I just stay here?"
- "I don't like going there"
- "I don't want to leave you"

What to say

Focus on:

acknowledging
separating feelings from the plan
staying calm and steady

Ages 3–5

- "I can see you don't want to go, but I'll be here when you come back"

Ages 6–9

- "I hear what you're saying — you don't want to go"
- "It's okay to feel like this"
- "I know it feels hard right now, but this is still the plan"
- "You can tell me how you feel when you come back"
- "Is there anything I can do to help you feel a bit better about going?"

Ages 10+

- "I understand why you don't want to go"
- "It's okay to feel like this"
- "At the moment, this is still the plan we have"
- "If you want to talk about it, we can always look at what might help going forward"

Reassurance for you

This is one of the hardest moments as a parent.

You can **be both empathetic and keep the boundary** at the same time, especially if you feel that going to the other parents house may not necessarily be what is best for your child.

When Your Child Shuts Down

What your child might say

- “I don’t want to talk about it”
- “I don’t know”
- (or they may go quiet, avoid eye contact, or walk away)

What to say

Ages 3-5

“That’s okay.
You don’t have to talk about it right now.
I’m here when you’re ready.”

Ages 6-9

“That’s okay.
You don’t have to talk about it right now.
We can talk about it another time if you want to.”

Ages 10+

“That’s okay.
You don’t have to talk about it right now.
If you do want to talk later, I’m here.”

Helping Your Child Understand Their Feelings

What might be happening

Sometimes your child feels something but **doesn't have the words for it yet.**

Helping your child **understand their feelings** gives them a way to make sense of **what's happening inside their body.**

What your child might say

- "I don't know why I feel like this"
- "I feel weird"
- "I don't like it"
- "I feel angry"

Often, children use the word angry to describe lots of different feelings like anxiety, overwhelm, or upset.

What not to say

- There's nothing to feel upset about"
- "You're fine"
- "You shouldn't feel like that"
- trying to explain the feeling away too quickly

What to say

Give your child **clear words** that help them understand what their body is doing.

When its overwhelm

This looks like overwhelm. That's when your body has too many things happening at once and it doesn't know what to do with all of it. It can feel like everything is building up inside you, like your body is full and it needs a break.

Nothing is wrong with you... your body is just telling you it's had enough for now.

Let's slow everything down for a minute. We don't need to figure anything out yet. We just need to help your body feel a bit calmer first.

When it's upset (but not clear why)

This feels like something is upsetting you, even if you don't fully know why yet.

Sometimes your body feels it before your brain understands it.

It can feel heavy inside, or uncomfortable, or like something just doesn't feel right.

You don't need to rush to explain it — we can just sit with it and work it out together when you're ready."

When its anxiety

This feels like anxiety. That's when your body is trying to protect you, even if there isn't something you need to do right now.

It can feel like a buzzing or tingly feeling, or like your body is on edge, or hot and uncomfortable. That's your body getting ready, even when it doesn't need to.

You're safe. Your body just needs a moment to realise that.

Let's slow it down together and let that feeling pass.

When it's worry

This feels like worry. That's when your brain keeps going over something again and again, trying to work it out or get ready for it.

It can feel like your thoughts won't switch off, or like something is sitting in your mind and won't go away.

Nothing is wrong, your brain is trying to help, but it doesn't always need to.

We don't need to solve it all right now. We can just notice it and let it settle.

When its confusion

This feels like confusion. That's when your brain is trying to make sense of something, but it doesn't have all the pieces yet.

It can feel like your thoughts are all mixed up, like everything is a bit jumbled or noisy in your head, and you can't quite settle on what's true or what makes sense.

That's okay, you don't have to figure it out all at once.

We can take it one small piece at a time and make sense of it together."

Why this helps

When children **understand what their body is doing,** the feeling becomes less confusing and less overwhelming.

Instead of feeling out of control, they begin to feel:

"I understand what this is"
"This makes sense"
"I can get through this"

When Your Child Repeats What They've Been Told

What your child might say

- "They said it's your fault"
- "They said you don't care"
- "They said you're lying"
- "They said you did something bad"

What to say

If they repeat something about you

"That might feel confusing to hear. Not everything that we hear is true. It's important that you work out for yourself what feels true to you. You don't have to decide anything right now. What matters is what you see and how you feel when you're with me."

If they ask you if it's true

"I can understand why you're asking that. Not everything you hear will be true. It's up to you to decide what you feel is true. You can trust your own feelings and your own experience."

If they seem unsure

"You don't need to decide what's true right now. It will all become clear eventually."

If they keep coming back to it

"I can see this has stayed on your mind. That makes sense. When things feel confusing, it's difficult to stop thinking about them. We can always talk about them and go through them together."

When Your Child Defends the Other Parent

What your child might say

- “They’re not that bad”
- “They didn’t mean it”
- “You’re being unfair”
- “They love me”

What to say

If they defend them

“You’re allowed to love them and see the good in them.”

If they push back on you

“We all experience different things and know different things, so you may feel differently to me about it, and that’s okay. Whatever you feel is true for you is okay.”

If they say they love them

“I know you do. It’s possible to love someone and for them to sometimes make you feel upset too. Both things can be true at the same time.”

If they minimise something

“You get to decide how things feel for you. If something doesn’t feel right, that matters.”

When Your Child Is Being Used as a Messenger

What your child might say

- “They told me to tell you something”
- “Can you tell them this?”
- “They said I have to ask you”

What to say

If they bring you a message

“Thank you for telling me. You don’t need to pass messages between us. I’ll take care of that.”

If they’re asked to say something back

“You don’t need to carry messages for us. I’ll handle that.”

If it keeps happening

“If this happens again, you can just let me know. You don’t need to do anything else.”

A note for you

It’s usually best not to ask your child to say things like “Mum said not to pass messages.”

They can simply listen, and then come and tell you.

When Your Child Blames Themselves

What your child might say

- “Was it my fault?”
- “Did I do something wrong?”
- “Is it because of me?”
- “I’ll be better next time”

What to say

If they blame themselves
“This is not your fault. Grown-ups are responsible for their own feelings and behaviour.”

If they keep questioning it
“You didn’t cause this, and it’s not your job to fix it.”

If they try to ‘be better’
“You don’t need to change who you are to make things better. You are already enough as you are.”

Link back to your core messages

1
This is not your fault. You are not to blame.

2
You are not responsible for anyone else's happiness, only your own.

3
There is nothing you could do or say that would stop me from loving you. I love you forever and always.

When Your Child Starts Believing Something Untrue About Themselves

What your child might say

- “I always get things wrong”
- “I’m just being annoying”
- “I should’ve done better”
- “They won’t like me if I do that”
- “I’ll just stay quiet”

What to say

If they feel like the problem

“You’re not the problem. Something around you has felt confusing, but that doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with you.”

If they feel responsible for others

“It’s not your job to fix how other people feel.”

If they make themselves smaller

“You don’t have to make yourself smaller. Your thoughts and feelings matter.”

If they feel like they are ‘too much’

“There is nothing wrong with your feelings. You’re allowed to feel everything you feel.”

If they try to be perfect

“You don’t have to be perfect to be loved. You are loved exactly as you are.”

Helping Your Child Make Sense of Behaviour

Children notice patterns before they understand them.

They might not have the words for what they're seeing, but they will feel when something doesn't quite make sense.

Over time, **confusing behaviour can lead to confusing thoughts** like:

- *"Is this normal?"*
- *"Is it me?"*
- *"Am I doing something wrong?"*

What this is about

As adults, we have words for these behaviours.

Such as gaslighting, belittling, parentification or alienation.

But this is **not about labelling people.**

It's **not about blaming.**

It's **not about asking your child to take sides.**

It's about helping your child:

- understand **what they are seeing**
- understand **how it feels**
- understand **why**
- understand **what is okay and what isn't**

The most important thing your child needs to know

When something feels confusing:

"**You don't need to change yourself** to make it make sense.

You can notice it, trust how it feels, and **talk about it with a safe adult.**

"In healthy relationships, people take responsibility when things don't go to plan. They explain, they apologise, they try again, and they try not to let it keep happening."

Hot and Cold Behaviour

(what adults might call inconsistency or emotional unpredictability)

What your child might say

- “Sometimes they’re really nice, and then they’re not”
- “I don’t know which version I’m going to get”
- “Sometimes it feels good, sometimes it doesn’t”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes people can be very kind one moment and then behave very differently the next.

That can feel confusing inside.

When someone changes like that, it can make it hard to feel calm, because you don’t know what to expect.

It’s not your job to work it out. What matters is noticing how it feels for you.”

A simple example

“If a friend is really kind to you one day, then ignores you the next, then is kind again, it can leave you feeling unsure, because you don’t know what’s going to happen next.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people act in similar ways each day. You know what to expect, and it helps you feel calm when you’re around them.

When someone is kind and caring most of the time, that’s part of who they are.

When someone changes a lot, it can feel confusing because you don’t always know who you’re going to get.”

Big Promises

(what adults might call overpromising or unrealistic promises)

What your child might say

- “They said we’re going to do something really big”
- “They promised something exciting”
- “Are we still going to do it?”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes people make big promises because they feel excited, or they want something to happen.

It’s okay to feel hopeful and excited too.

But not every promise turns into something real, so it’s important to hold excitement and understanding at the same time.”

A simple example

“If someone says they’re going to bring something really special to school tomorrow, you can feel really excited about it before it even happens.

But what we have to remember is that things can change right up until the moment it actually happens.

So we can enjoy the excitement, but also be a little bit prepared for change even if it changes in a way we don’t like.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people try to make promises they know they can keep.
And if they’re not sure, they say that instead of making something sound certain.”

When Promises Don't Happen

(what adults might call being let down)

What your child might say

- "They said it would happen, but it didn't"
- "Why didn't it happen?"
- "They forgot"

A simple way to explain it to your child

"Sometimes people say something will happen, and then it doesn't.

That can feel really disappointing.

Sometimes this happens by accident. People forget, or something changes.

Occasional or accidental letdowns are things we can forgive.

What helps us understand the difference is what happens afterwards.

When someone lets you down, they should take responsibility, explain what happened, and say sorry. That helps you feel understood and shows they care about how you feel.

But if these things keep happening, and the person doesn't say sorry or take responsibility, it can start to feel more upsetting over time.

That's the part that isn't okay and that's the part we don't always have to accept."

A simple example

"If a friend says they're going to bring you something and then forgets, that can feel disappointing.

But if they don't say sorry, don't explain what happened, and it keeps happening again and again, it might start to feel hurtful.

If someone keeps hurting you like that, they might not be the kind of person you want to be around."

Being Very Loving, Then Distant

(what adults might call love bombing)

What your child might say

- “Sometimes they’re really, really nice to me”
- “They say really big, lovely things”
- “Then they go quiet or different again”
- “I don’t understand why it changes”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes people can be very, very loving and say lots of big, kind things all at once. That can feel really nice at the time.

But when something feels very big and loving one moment, and very different the next, it can feel confusing inside.

It can make your feelings go up and down too.

It’s not your job to keep that feeling going or to work out why it changes.

What matters is noticing how it feels for you over time.”

A simple example

“If a friend tells you you’re their best friend ever and wants to be with you all the time, and then the next day ignores you or acts differently, it can feel confusing and a bit upsetting, because it changes so quickly.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, kindness and love don’t feel up and down like a rollercoaster.

You don’t have to earn it, and it doesn’t suddenly disappear.

You shouldn’t have to work hard to keep feeling love and kindness.”

When Things Feel Unpredictable

(what adults might call unpredictability or inconsistency)

What your child might say

- “I don’t know what’s going to happen”
- “Sometimes it’s okay and sometimes it’s not”
- “I don’t know what mood they’ll be in”
- “I feel like I have to be careful”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes things can feel unpredictable, like you’re not quite sure what’s going to happen or how someone is going to behave.

That can make your body feel a bit on edge, because it’s trying to be ready for anything.

When things feel like that, it’s not because you’ve done something wrong.

It’s because things around you are changing in ways that are hard to understand.

You don’t need to try and control it or get it right. You can just notice how it feels.”

A simple example

“If a friend is sometimes kind, sometimes not, and you never quite know what version you’re going to get, you might start to feel like you have to be extra careful around them.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, things feel more predictable.

You know how someone is likely to behave, and you don’t feel like you have to be careful all the time.

You can relax and be yourself.”

When Rules Keep Changing

(what adults might call inconsistency or moving expectations)

What your child might say

- “I thought that was allowed before”
- “The rules are different now”
- “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do”
- “I feel like I get it wrong”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes rules can change, and that can feel confusing.

If rules change a lot, or change without being explained, it can make it hard to know what’s right or what’s expected.

That’s not because you’re doing something wrong.

It’s because the rules around you aren’t clear or consistent.

You’re not meant to guess or get it perfect every time.”

A simple example

“If a teacher says one day you’re allowed to do something, and the next day says you’re not, without explaining why, it can leave you feeling unsure about what to do.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy situations, rules are clear and explained.

If something changes, you’re told why, so you can understand what’s expected and feel confident about what to do.”

When Someone Says Something Didn't Happen

(what adults might call gaslighting)

What your child might say

- "They said that didn't happen"
- "They said they never said that"
- "I remember it but they said it's not true"

A simple way to explain it to your child

"Sometimes something can happen... and then afterwards, the person acts like it didn't.

That can feel really confusing.

Because in your mind, it did happen. And in your body, it still feels like it happened.

Sometimes people pretend something didn't happen because they feel embarrassed, or they don't want to talk about it, or they don't want to say sorry.

But that doesn't mean it didn't happen. And it doesn't mean it's your fault.

When someone says something didn't happen, it can make your thoughts feel a bit wobbly.

You might start wondering if you got it wrong.

But that wobbly feeling doesn't mean you imagined it.

It just means something didn't feel right."

A simple example

"If someone says something unkind, and later they smile and act like everything is fine, it can make you feel unsure about what really happened."

What feels healthy instead

"In healthy relationships, if something hurtful happens, it is acknowledged.

People take responsibility.

They don't pretend it didn't happen.

They help you feel clear, not confused."

When Everything Becomes Your Fault

(what adults might call blame shifting)

What your child might say

- “They said it was my fault”
- “I always get blamed”
- “They said I made them angry”
- “Maybe it is because of me”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes when something goes wrong, people might say it’s someone else’s fault instead of taking responsibility themselves.

That can feel really upsetting, especially if it keeps happening.

But other people’s feelings and reactions come from inside them.

You are not responsible for making someone angry, upset, or frustrated.

You can make mistakes sometimes, like everyone does.

But you are not the reason for how someone else behaves.”

A simple example

“If a friend gets upset and says it’s your fault, even when you didn’t do anything wrong, it can start to make you question yourself. But that doesn’t mean it really is your fault.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people take responsibility for their own feelings and actions.

If something goes wrong, they talk about it fairly.

They don’t blame everything on someone else.”

When Someone Avoids Talking About Things

(what adults might call deflection)

What your child might say

- “They changed the subject”
- “They didn’t answer me”
- “They started talking about something else”
- “We never actually talked about it”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes when something needs to be talked about, a person might avoid it.

They might change the subject, talk about something else, or not answer the question.

That can feel confusing, because the thing you wanted to talk about never gets properly heard or understood.

It’s not your job to chase the answer or try to make the conversation happen.

You’re allowed to notice when something hasn’t been talked about properly.

If you’re unsure or it’s still on your mind, you can always talk to a safe adult who will help you understand it.”

A simple example

“If you try to tell a friend that something upset you, and they suddenly start talking about something completely different, it can feel like your feelings weren’t listened to.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people are willing to talk about things, even if it feels a bit uncomfortable.

They listen, they respond, and they try to understand what’s being said.”

When Someone Says It's Not a Big Deal

(what adults might call minimising)

What your child might say

- "They said it's not a big deal"
- "They said I'm overreacting"
- "They said it doesn't matter"
- "They told me to just get over it"

A simple way to explain it to your child

"Sometimes when something matters to you, someone might say it's not a big deal.

That can feel confusing, especially if it did feel like a big deal to you.

Your feelings don't stop being important just because someone else says that they aren't."

A simple example

"If something happens at school that upsets you, and someone says 'it's not a big deal', it can make you feel like you're just being silly or your feelings don't count even though they do."

What feels healthy instead

"In healthy relationships, people take your feelings seriously.

Even if they don't fully understand, they listen and try to see things from your point of view.

They don't dismiss how you feel."

When Someone Ignores You

(what adults might call the silent treatment)

What your child might say

- “They’re not talking to me”
- “They’re ignoring me”
- “I don’t know what I’ve done”
- “They won’t answer me”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes when someone feels upset, they might stop talking or ignore you instead of explaining what’s wrong.

That can feel confusing, because you’re left wondering what happened.

You might start trying to work it out or fix it.

But you are not responsible for making someone talk to you again.

If someone has a problem, it’s their responsibility to explain it in a kind and clear way.”

A simple example

“If a friend suddenly stops talking to you and won’t tell you why, you might keep thinking about what you did wrong even if you didn’t do anything.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people communicate.

If something is wrong, they explain it.

They don’t ignore you or leave you guessing.

It’s okay for people to need space, but they can tell you that so you know what’s going on and you’re not left trying to work it out.”

When Someone Expects You to Look After Them

(what adults might call parentification)

What your child might say

- “They always ask me to help them with things”
- “They said they need me”
- “I have to make them feel better”
- “I need to look after them”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes a grown-up might expect a child to help with their feelings or take care of them.

That can feel important, like you need to step in and help.

But children are not meant to look after grown-ups in that way.

Grown-ups are responsible for their own feelings and for taking care of themselves.

You can be kind and helpful, but it is not your job to fix how a grown-up feels or to take care of them.”

A simple example

“If a friend at school said they were upset and told you it was your job to make them feel better all the time, that would feel like a lot of responsibility that isn’t yours.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, grown-ups take care of children, not the other way around.

It’s okay to be kind and caring, but you are not responsible for someone else’s feelings.

You are only responsible for yourself.”

When Someone Makes You Responsible for Their Feelings

(what adults might call emotional responsibility or emotional pressure)

What your child might say

- “They said I made them upset”
- “They said it’s because of me”
- “They said I hurt their feelings”
- “I feel like I have to make them happy again”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes someone might say that how they feel is because of you.

That can feel like you need to fix it or make it better.

Some people say this because kind people will often try to make things right.

But that doesn’t mean you should change who you are to do that.

Everyone is responsible for their own feelings.

You can be kind and thoughtful, but you are not in charge of making someone else happy or stopping them from feeling upset.

Feelings come from inside each person.”

A simple example

“If a friend says they’re upset and tells you it’s your job to make them feel better, you might feel like you have to fix it.

But their feelings are still their responsibility.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people take responsibility for their own feelings.

They might tell you how they feel, but they don’t expect you to fix it for them.

You can care about someone without being responsible for how they feel.”

When Someone Chooses Favourites or Compares

(what adults might call triangulation or favouritism)

What your child might say

- “They like them more than me”
- “They said they’re better than me”
- “Why am I always the one getting in trouble?”
- “They treat us differently”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes people compare others or treat them differently.

That can make it feel like one person is better or more important than another.

That feeling can really hurt.

But how someone treats others tells you more about them than it does about you.

You are not less important, less loved, or less good because of how someone behaves.

You don’t need to compete with anyone to be enough.”

A simple example

“If a friend at school is kind to one person but unkind to another, it can make it feel like someone is being chosen over someone else.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, people are treated fairly.

You don’t have to compete to feel valued.

You are accepted for who you are, not compared to someone else.”

When Love Feels Like It Comes and Goes

(what adults might call conditional love)

What your child might say

- “They’re nice when I do what they want”
- “They’re not nice when I don’t”
- “I feel like I have to be good”
- “I don’t know when they’ll be kind to me”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes it can feel like love or kindness depends on what you do.

That can make you feel like you have to get things right all the time to keep it.

But love isn’t something you should have to earn.

You shouldn’t have to change your behaviour just to feel cared for.

Real love doesn’t come and go depending on what you do.

You are worthy of love just as you are.”

A simple example

“If a friend is only kind to you when you do what they want, but becomes unkind when you don’t, it can feel like you have to keep them happy to be treated well.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, love and kindness don’t depend on you getting everything right.

You don’t have to earn it.

You feel cared for even when you make mistakes.”

When Nothing Feels Good Enough

(what adults might call criticism or moving goalposts)

What your child might say

- “It’s never good enough”
- “They always want more”
- “I tried my best but it still wasn’t right”
- “I feel like I can’t get it right”

A simple way to explain it to your child

“Sometimes no matter what you do, it can feel like it’s not enough.

That can make you feel like you have to keep trying harder and harder to get it right.

But you are not meant to feel like that all the time.

You can try your best, and that is enough.

If someone keeps changing what they expect or keeps finding something wrong, that’s not something you need to fix.

It doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with you.”

A simple example

“If you complete your work and someone says it’s not good enough, then when you try again they still find something else wrong, it can feel like you can never get it right.”

What feels healthy instead

“In healthy relationships, effort is recognised.

You are encouraged, supported, and helped to grow.

You don’t feel like the target keeps moving or that you can never meet expectations.”

When Your Child Is Given Adult Information

Some adults say things to children that they shouldn't.

This can leave children feeling confused or worried.

In an ideal world

In an ideal world, children wouldn't hear these kinds of conversations.

But sometimes, **this isn't something you can control.**

And when that happens, your role is not to explain everything or correct every detail.

A note on age and how to use these scripts

Some of these topics are still too adult for younger children.

In those moments, the simplest and most helpful response is:

"That's something for grown-ups to think about.
I don't want you to worry about it.
I will tell you about it when you're older."

You don't need to explain everything straight away.

As children get older, they may ask more questions or need a little more understanding.

The age ranges in this guide are suggestions, not rules.

You know your child best.

You can decide when they are ready for more, and how much to share.

Your role in these moments

Your role is to gently **take the weight off their shoulders.**

To show them:

- they don't need to worry about this
- they don't need to figure it out
- they don't need to solve it

You don't need to go into detail (if you don't want to)

You don't need to correct everything.

Relationship Breakdown

(when your child is told about why the relationship ended)

What your child might say

- “They said we were all happy until you broke up our family”
- “Why did you split up?”
- “Whose fault was it?”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“That’s a grown-up situation, and it’s not something you need to worry about.

Remember how we spoke about not being responsible for anyone else’s happiness?

I’m only responsible for my happiness, and that meant we couldn’t be together anymore.

What matters is that I love you forever and always.”

Ages 10+

“Relationships can be complicated, and there isn’t always one simple reason why they don’t work out.

In a relationship, both people need to be happy, and if they’re not, it’s okay to stop the relationship.

It’s not something you need to work out or worry about.

You also need to remember that there are often two sides to each story.

What matters is that you are safe, loved, and cared for.”

Money & Finances

(when your child is told things about money between parents)

What your child might say

- “They said you take all their money”
- “They said they can’t afford things because of you”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Money is something grown-ups deal with. It’s not something you need to worry about or understand.

It’s important to me that I am fair when it comes to money.

Sometimes they give money to help pay for what you need, and I use my money to pay for what we have here.

All that matters is that you have everything you need.”

Ages 10+

“Money situations between adults can be complicated, but it’s not your responsibility to figure it out or worry about it.

It’s important to me that I am fair about money, and there are systems that help make this fair.

There are things like calculators that work out how we should share the costs of what you need, based on what we both earn and what we can afford.

The adults deal with that. Your job is to focus on being a child, and I will make sure you have everything you need here.”

Court & Legal Issues

(when your child is told about court or legal matters)

What your child might say

- “They said they have to go to court because of you”
- “They said you won’t let them see me more”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Court is something grown-ups use to help make decisions when they can’t agree.

It’s not something you need to worry about.

The grown-ups will take care of it, and your job is just to be a child.”

Ages 10+

“Sometimes when adults can’t agree, they use something called court to help make decisions.

It’s there to help make things fair and safe.

It’s not something you need to worry about or get involved in.

The adults deal with that.

Your focus should be on being a child and getting on with your life.

If there are any changes or anything you need to know, I will make sure to tell you.”

Negative or Untrue Things About You

(when your child is told things about you that are untrue or unfair)

What your child might say

- “They said you don’t care about me”
- “They said something bad about you”
- “They said it’s your fault”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Sometimes people say things that aren’t kind or might be a story.

You don’t need to work out what’s true or not.

What matters is what you believe and how you feel.”

Ages 10+

“Sometimes people say things that aren’t fully true, and sometimes things are more of a story.

When there is a disagreement, there is usually more than one point of view, and this is just opinion.

You don’t need to figure it all out.

You can use and trust your own experience, how you feel, and what you see over time to decide what you believe.”

Gender Stereotypes

(when your child is told how boys or girls "should" be)

What your child might say

- "Boys aren't meant to cry"
- "Girls should look pretty"
- "Boys have to be strong"
- "Girls need someone to look after them"

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

"Sometimes people have ideas about how boys or girls should be.

But those are just ideas, not rules.

You can be yourself and choose who you want to be."

Ages 10+

"Sometimes people have strong opinions about how boys and girls should behave.

But those are beliefs, not facts.

You get to decide who you are, what matters to you, and how you want to live your life."

Health / Illness Guilt

(when your child is made to feel responsible for someone being unwell or struggling)

What your child might say

- “They said I’m making them stressed”
- “They said I’m the reason they’re not well”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Sometimes people feel unwell or stressed, but that comes from inside their own body.

It’s not something you can cause or fix.

Your job is just to be you.”

Ages 10+

“People can feel stressed or unwell for lots of reasons, but those feelings come from within them.

You are not responsible for someone else’s health or emotions.

You don’t have the power to cause it, and you don’t have the responsibility to fix it.”

Victim Narratives

(when your child is told one parent is being treated unfairly or is a "victim")

What your child might say

- "They said everything is unfair"
- "They said they've been treated badly"
- "They said no one listens to them"
- "I feel sorry for them"

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

"Sometimes people feel things are unfair, and they can talk about that.

But it's not your job to fix it or make it better.

Grown-ups take care of their own problems."

Ages 10+

"Sometimes people feel like things are unfair or that they've been treated badly.

That can be how they see things, but it's not your responsibility to fix it.

We all have the power to control our own lives and how we see things.

We can look at things in a positive or negative way, but that's our choice and how we choose to handle things."

“You Deserve to Know” Conversations

(when your child is told things under the idea that they “should know the truth”)

What your child might say

- “They said I deserve to know the truth”
- “They told me something and said not to tell you”
- “They said I’m old enough to understand”
- “They said I should know what really happened”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Sometimes people say things because they think you should know, but not everything is meant for children to understand.

If there’s anything important for you, I will always tell you in a way that makes sense.”

Ages 10+

“Sometimes people share information and say you ‘deserve to know’, but that doesn’t always mean it’s the right thing to share with you.

There are some things that are meant for adults to deal with.

If something is important for you to understand, I will always explain it in a way that feels clear and safe.”

Different Rules in Different Homes

(when your child compares rules or resists boundaries)

What your child might say

- “I don’t have to do that there”
- “Their rules are better”
- “Your rules are silly”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“Different homes can have different rules, and that’s okay.

In our home, these are the rules we follow.

We can talk about rules kindly, even if we don’t agree with them.”

Ages 10+

“It’s okay for different homes to have different rules.

You don’t have to agree with every rule, but you do need to follow the rules in the home you’re in.

It’s also important to be respectful when talking about other people’s rules, even if they feel different to yours.”

Helping Your Child Stay Safe with Technology & Communication

Technology makes it easier for children to stay in contact.

But it can also **create pressure**, especially when your child feels like they need to reply, explain, or manage the interaction.

Your child does not need to manage communication between adults.

They don't need to:

- reply straight away
- explain things on your behalf
- or feel responsible for how someone else feels

What your child needs to understand

- they are allowed to **take their time**
- they are allowed to **step away**
- they are allowed to **come to you if something doesn't feel right**

Messages

What your child might say

- They messaged me"
- "I don't know what to say back"
- "They asked me something about you"

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

"You don't need to reply straight away.

If you're not sure what to say, you can always come and talk to me first."

Ages 10+

"You're allowed to take your time before replying.

If something feels confusing or too much, you don't have to deal with it on your own.

You can always come to me."

Phone Calls

What your child might say

- “They keep calling me”
- “I don’t want to answer”
- “I don’t know what to say”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“You don’t have to answer straight away.

If you’re not ready, that’s okay.”

Ages 10+

“You’re allowed to choose when you answer calls.

If it doesn’t feel like a good time, you can leave it and come back to it later.”

Gaming & Online Contact

What your child might say

- “They were talking to me on the game”
- “It made me feel funny”
- “I didn’t like what was said”

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

“If something doesn’t feel right, you can stop and come and tell me.

You don’t have to stay in that situation.”

Ages 10+

“If something feels uncomfortable, you’re allowed to step away.
You don’t need to keep talking or stay in te game.
You can always come and talk to me about it.

Reducing Contact

Sometimes you may decide that **messages, calls, or gaming need to be reduced.**

This might be because:

- your **child's behaviour has changed**
- the **contact feels too intense**
- or **something doesn't feel right**

What your child might say

- "Why can't I reply?"
- "Why can't I talk to them?"
- "They'll be upset"
- "I have to answer"

What to say

Ages 6 - 9

"I've noticed this has been feeling a bit too much.
We're going to take a little break from messages and calls for now.
You don't need to worry about that, I will handle it."

Ages 10+

"I've noticed that this contact has been feeling a bit intense, and it's important to me that it feels manageable for you.
So we're going to reduce messages and calls for now.
You don't need to manage that or explain it, I will handle it."

If they are worried about the other parent

Ages 6 - 9

"You don't need to worry about how they feel.
Grown-ups manage their own feelings."

Ages 10+

"You're not responsible for how they feel about this.
That's for them to manage. You can always talk to them when you see them in person."

When Your Child Is Not Seeing the Other Parent

What your child might say

- “Why am I not seeing them?”
- “When will I see them again?”
- “What’s happening?”

What to say

Ages 3 - 5

“Right now, I’m making decisions to make sure things are safe and right for you.

I will tell you if anything changes.”

Ages 6 - 9

“Right now, I’m making decisions to make sure things are safe and right for you.

You don’t need to worry about it.

I will let you know if anything changes.”

Ages 10+

“Right now, I’m making decisions to make sure things are safe and right for you.

I know that might feel confusing, but you don’t need to work it out.

If anything changes, I will always tell you.”

When Your Child Asks Why They're Not Seeing the Other Parent

What your child might say

- "Why can't I see them?"
- "Did something happen?"
- "Is it my fault?"

What to say

Ages 3 - 5

"This isn't because of you.

Grown-ups are making decisions."

Ages 6 - 9

"This isn't because of you.

Sometimes grown-ups have to make decisions to make sure things are okay.

You don't need to worry about it."

Ages 10+

"This isn't because of you.

Sometimes decisions are made to make sure things are safe and right.

You don't need to take responsibility for that."

When Your Child Thinks the Other Parent Doesn't Want Them

What your child might say

- "Do they not want to see me?"
- "Have I done something wrong?"
- "Why don't they want me?"

What to say

Ages 3 - 5

"That's not because of you.

You are always loved."

Ages 6 - 9

"That's not because of you.

Grown-ups make their own choices, and that's not something you control.

You are loved."

Ages 10+

"That's not because of you.

The choices adults make are about them, not about your worth.

Nothing about this changes how loved or important you are."

When Your Child Wants Contact

What your child might say

- “I want to see them”
- “Can I message them?”
- “I miss them”

What to say

Ages 3 - 5

“I understand.

It’s okay to miss them.”

Ages 6 - 9

“I understand that you miss them.

That makes sense.

You can always talk to me about how you feel.”

Ages 10+

“I understand that you miss them and want contact.

That’s completely okay.

You’re allowed to feel that way, and we can always talk about it.”

When You Want to Go Back and Say It Differently

Sometimes you might walk away from a conversation and feel like you didn't quite say what you meant, or didn't handle it in the way you would have liked.

That's completely normal.

You don't need to get it right in the moment.

What matters is that you come back to it.

What to say

Ages 3 - 5

"I've been thinking about what we talked about earlier.
I want to say it again in a better way."

Ages 6 - 9

"I've been thinking about our conversation earlier, and I'd like to explain it a bit more clearly."

Ages 10+

"I've been thinking about what I said earlier, and I don't think I explained it in the best way. I'd like to come back to it."

If you said too much

"That was more information than you needed.
You don't need to worry about that."

If you reacted in the moment

"I didn't handle that in the way I wanted to.
I'm going to try again."

If you want to reinforce the message

"I just want to be really clear about something.
You don't need to worry about this, and you don't need to figure it out."

Hi, I'm Ashling



ABOUT ME

I'm a parent, just like you.

Everything I've created has come from **wanting to support my own children** through situations that felt confusing, overwhelming, and at times, really difficult to put into words.

I have a **degree in childhood and psychology**, but more than anything, this work comes from **lived experience.** From trying things that worked, and things that didn't. From figuring out **what actually helps in real life, not just in theory.**

In 2022, I left a **difficult relationship** with my children, who were just 1 and 3 at the time.

I was broke, homeless, and jobless, and I had to **rebuild our lives from scratch.**

At first, my focus was on **healing myself.**

But as time went on, I realised something...**my children needed support to heal too**.

That's where this work really began.

My goal has always been simple.

- To break things down into **easy, bite-sized pieces.**
- To give you the **shortest route to the solution.**
- To help you feel **reassured, more confident** in your parenting, and **more connected** to your child.

I don't believe you need long explanations or complicated strategies.

You need **the right words, the right understanding,** and something you can actually **use in your day-to-day life.**

My Books

My books were written for **my own children**.

They go deeper into many of the behaviours you've seen in this guide and **help children understand what they are experiencing in a way that feels safe.**

Children don't always open up through direct conversation.

Stories give them an **opportunity, not an obligation,** to explore what they're feeling.

Sometimes that's where the real understanding starts.

You can find all of my books here:
https://www.amazon.com/author/ashlingpodmore

I'm always creating new ones, often starting as scrap paper and stick man drawings before becoming something I can share with other families.

New books are added regularly. **Looking for a book on a particular topic?**

Let me know!



My Courses

My courses are designed to be **short, easy & bite-sized.**

I keep them **affordable**, but always **valuable.**
I don't believe in overpricing.

This is information I already had, or research I willingly did for my own children.

For me, the value is in helping more families find:

- **peace and calm in their home**
- **strong, unbreakable connection with their children**
- **clarity for their future**
- and **healing**

No two families experience difficult relationships or situations in the same way.

So there isn't one single solution.

My approach gives you the choice.

You can pick what you need most right now.

Start with your biggest concern...add more later if you need to.

As a busy parent, I know **time is limited.**

That's why I don't add fluff to make things longer.

I get **straight to the point.**

Everything I teach is:

- **practical**
- **achievable**
- and **designed to fit into your everyday life**

As soon as a course is ready, I release it. I don't believe in withholding information for big 'launches'.

Need a particular course? Tell me.
If I can help...I will



Courses in Progress

I'm always creating new courses based on **what families need most.**

Some of the next ones include:

- **The 24 Hour Reset** — reducing anxiety, meltdowns, and upset during transitions between homes
- **Permission to Parent** — reclaiming control and moving away from compensatory parenting
- **Breaking the Cycle** — stopping patterns so children don't carry them forward
- **Steady Foundations** — the 5 pillars of safe communication and building a strong connection
- **Forever and Always** — protecting your relationship from alienation
- **Roots to Wings** — understanding coping strategies and transforming protective behaviours

As well as **smaller, focused courses** on:

- gaslighting
- aggressive behaviour
- parentification
- and other confusing adult behaviours

You can explore all courses here: **https://ashlingpodmore.systeme.io/courses-mainpage**