

NUR AL-QALAM DAR

دار نور القلم

What to Say *Instead*

Fifty word-for-word replacements for the things you say when you've run out of patience.

50 scripts across 10 situations

Written to be opened at 9pm, not read once

COMPANION GUIDE

Why you already know better and still say it anyway

The problem isn't that you don't know shouting is wrong. It's that at the moment it matters, you have nothing else loaded.

You've read the parenting advice. You agree with it. Then your son does the thing for the fourth time in an hour, something goes tight in your chest, and out comes a sentence your own mother used to say. You hear yourself saying it and you can't stop, because in that half-second there was nothing else available.

That's what this guide fixes. Not your understanding. Your vocabulary under pressure.

When you're calm, your brain has full access to everything you know about parenting. When you're angry, most of that goes offline and you fall back on whatever's automatic. For most of us, what's automatic is what we heard growing up. That's why parents who genuinely want to do better still find their father's words coming out of their mouth.

You can't reason your way out of that in the moment. What works is having a small number of replacement sentences rehearsed well enough that they're available when the good thinking isn't. That's the whole idea here. Fifty sentences, grouped by the situation that triggers them, each one short enough to actually say when you're tired.

إِنَّ الرِّفْقَ لَا يَكُونُ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا زَانَهُ وَلَا يَنْزَعُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا شَانَهُ

Gentleness is not present in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disfigures it.

Sahih Muslim

Notice what that report is actually claiming. Not that gentleness is nicer. That its absence damages the thing itself. Applied to a household, the harshness doesn't just make a moment unpleasant. It changes what the home becomes.

How to use this

- **Don't read all fifty.** You won't retain them and you'll feel worse for trying. Pick the two situations that happen most in your house.
- **Take three scripts from those two sections.** Three, not thirty.
- **Say them out loud a few times when nothing is happening.** This feels ridiculous. Do it anyway. A sentence you've said out loud is available to you under pressure in a way a sentence you've only read is not.
- **Expect it to feel fake at first.** It will. It's supposed to. Every new habit feels like acting until it stops.

- **Come back in two weeks for three more.**

ONE HONEST WARNING

These sentences are not magic. Saying the right words in a house where a child feels unloved changes nothing, and a child can hear contempt underneath a perfectly chosen phrase. The words work when they're carrying something real. Treat them as a way to get your actual intention out intact, rather than as a technique to manage your child with.

The ten situations

Go straight to the one happening in your house tonight.

No.	Situation	What these scripts do
One	When you're about to lose it	Buy you the seconds you need before you say something you'll carry
Two	When they won't listen	Get compliance without the repeated shouting cycle
Three	When they talk back	Address the manner without turning it into a power fight
Four	When they're fighting each other	Stop the fight without appointing a winner and a villain
Five	When they lie to you	Make honesty cheaper than concealment
Six	When it's a battle over salah	Keep prayer from becoming the site of your conflict
Seven	When they're melting down	Bring the temperature down instead of matching it
Eight	When it's school and homework	Address effort without attacking the child's worth
Nine	After you've already lost your temper	Repair it properly, because this matters more than avoiding it
Ten	When things are going well	Say the things that build the account you draw on later

How each script is laid out

1. THE SITUATION YOU'RE IN

INSTEAD OF *The sentence that comes out automatically*

SAY **The replacement, word for word**

A line on why the second one lands differently.

SECTION ONE

When you're about to lose it

The five most valuable sentences in this guide

These are the ones I'd learn first. Not because they solve the problem, but because they buy you the three or four seconds between the surge and the sentence. That gap is where every other script in this guide becomes possible.

1. YOU FEEL IT RISING AND YOU KNOW WHAT'S COMING

INSTEAD OF *"That's it. I've had enough of you today."*

SAY **"I'm too angry to talk about this properly. Give me five minutes."**

You're not backing down and you're not pretending to be calm. You're naming the state and delaying the response. Children accept this far more readily than parents expect, and it models something they'll need themselves.

2. YOU'VE ASKED FOUR TIMES AND THE FIFTH IS ABOUT TO BE A SHOUT

INSTEAD OF *"HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?"*

SAY **"I've asked four times. I'm not asking again. Come here."**

The shout is a question that doesn't want an answer. The replacement states the fact and moves to action. Going to them physically instead of raising your voice across the house is half the technique.

3. YOU'RE ABOUT TO SAY THE THING YOU HEARD AS A CHILD

INSTEAD OF *"You're going to make me do something I'll regret."*

SAY **"I'm walking away for a minute. This isn't finished."**

Never make your child responsible for your control. That sentence teaches a child that your reactions are their fault, and it's a lesson that follows some people into their marriages.

4. EVERYTHING HAS GONE WRONG AND THEY'VE JUST ADDED TO IT

INSTEAD OF *"Do you know what kind of day I've had?"*

SAY **"My day was hard before this. That's mine, not yours. Let's deal with the plate."**

Separating your state from their behaviour keeps you from punishing a small thing with the weight of a large one. Children notice when a spilled drink gets a reaction sized for something else.

5. YOU'VE REACHED THE EDGE AND THERE'S NO EXIT

INSTEAD OF *Raising your voice because it's the only lever left*

SAY **"A'udhu billahi min ash-shaytan ir-rajeem." Then sit down where you're standing.**

The Prophet ﷺ instructed a man in anger toward seeking refuge, and taught that one standing in anger should sit. It's a physical interruption of a physical state. It works because it changes your body, not because it changes your mind.

A man asked the Prophet ﷺ for counsel and was told: do not become angry. He repeated his request several times, and each time received the same reply.

Sahih al-Bukhari

SECTION TWO

When they won't listen

Getting compliance without the shouting cycle

1. THE INSTRUCTION HAS BEEN IGNORED THREE TIMES

INSTEAD OF *"Are you deaf? I'm talking to you!"*

SAY **"Look at me. Shoes. Now, please."**

Eye contact first, then a short instruction. Most ignored instructions were never actually received, because they were shouted at a child whose attention was somewhere else.

2. THEY'RE REFUSING OUTRIGHT

INSTEAD OF *"You'll do it because I said so."*

SAY **"This one isn't a choice. You can do it now or in five minutes, but it's happening."**

The authority is intact and you've handed them a small piece of control inside it. Children resist far less when they get to choose something, even something minor.

3. THEY'RE DELIBERATELY SLOW

INSTEAD OF *"You're so lazy. You never do anything I ask."*

SAY **"I need this done before Maghrib. What's your plan?"**

Never is almost always false, and children know it, which lets them dismiss the whole complaint. Naming a deadline and asking for their plan puts the problem in their hands.

4. YOU NEED THEM OFF THE SCREEN

INSTEAD OF *"Turn it off NOW or I'm taking that phone for a week."*

SAY **"Ten minutes, then it goes on the shelf. I'll tell you when there's two left."**

Abrupt removal from something absorbing produces a fight in most children and most adults. The warning is the whole mechanism.

5. THE SAME PROBLEM EVERY SINGLE MORNING

INSTEAD OF *"Why do we go through this every day?"*

SAY **"Mornings aren't working. Sit with me tonight and we'll fix it together."**

A recurring failure is a system problem, not a character problem. Fixing it at a calm hour costs you twenty minutes once instead of ten minutes daily.

SECTION THREE

When they talk back

Correcting the manner without starting a war

1. THE RUDE REPLY IN FRONT OF EVERYONE

INSTEAD OF *"Don't you dare speak to me like that! Who do you think you are?"*

SAY **"Not like that. We'll talk after."**

Short, calm, and no audience. Then actually follow through privately. A parent who doesn't need to perform authority in front of guests reads as more secure in it, not less.

2. A FAIR POINT DELIVERED BADLY

INSTEAD OF *"I don't care what your reason is, watch your tone."*

SAY **"Your point is fair. Say it again without the attitude and I'll actually listen."**

If you only ever attack the delivery, they learn that being right doesn't help them, so they stop trying to be right and just get louder.

3. THE MUTTERING UNDER THE BREATH

INSTEAD OF *"What did you just say? Say it to my face!"*

SAY **"If it's worth saying, say it properly. I'll listen."**

Demanding they repeat it forces them to either escalate or back down humiliated. Neither one helps you.

4. THE EYE-ROLL

INSTEAD OF *"Roll your eyes at me one more time and see what happens."*

SAY **Nothing, this once. Address it later when it's calm.**

Some things aren't worth a confrontation in the moment, and reacting to every small provocation trains them that they can start a fight whenever they want one. Choose what you spend your authority on.

5. RUDENESS TOWARD THEIR MOTHER

INSTEAD OF *"Apologise to your mother right now!"*

SAY **"Stop. That's your mother. Go and sit down, then come back and speak to her properly."**

A forced immediate apology is usually theatre. Sending them to reset and return produces something closer to real. This is one of the few places I'd hold the line without any flexibility at all.

SECTION FOUR

When they're fighting each other

Ending it without appointing a villain

1. THE NOISE FROM THE OTHER ROOM

INSTEAD OF *"What is going on in here? Who started it?"*

SAY **"Both of you, separate rooms. Ten minutes. Then we talk."**

Investigating who started it turns every fight into a competition to be the better witness. Separate first, discuss later, and you skip the entire performance.

2. ONE OF THEM IS CLEARLY AT FAULT

INSTEAD OF *"You're older, you should know better."*

SAY **"You hit him. That's the part I'm dealing with. What he did is separate and I'll deal with that too."**

The older child hears "you should know better" as a life sentence, and resentment toward the younger one builds on exactly that phrase. Deal with each act on its own.

3. THE CONSTANT TATTTLING

INSTEAD OF *"Stop coming to me with every little thing."*

SAY **"Is he hurting you or is he annoying you? If he's hurting you I want to know. If he's annoying you, come and tell me what you tried first."**

Teaching the distinction keeps the door open for real problems while reducing the traffic. A child who's told to stop reporting entirely will also stop reporting the things you need to hear.

4. "YOU ALWAYS TAKE HIS SIDE"

INSTEAD OF *"That's not true and you know it."*

SAY **"Tell me when you've felt that. I want to hear it."**

Defending yourself confirms their suspicion that you're not listening. Asking for the evidence often reveals something real you'd missed, and it always shows them that you'll hear a complaint about yourself.

5. THE COMPARISON YOU'RE ABOUT TO MAKE

INSTEAD OF *"Why can't you be more like your brother?"*

SAY **"I need this from you specifically. Here's what I've seen you do well before."**

Comparison doesn't produce effort. It produces resentment toward the sibling and a permanent memory of the sentence. Adults quote these back to their parents thirty years later, word for word.

SECTION FIVE

When they lie to you

Making honesty cheaper than hiding

Ibn Khaldun identified severity as a direct cause of deceit in children. A child raised under harsh correction, he wrote, learns to say what is not in his heart because fear has taught him to, until deceit becomes his habit. If your child lies to you often, the scripts below matter, but so does an honest look at what your reactions have cost.

1. YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER

INSTEAD OF *"Did you take it? Tell me the truth."*

SAY **"I know you took it. Let's talk about what happens now."**

Asking a question you know the answer to sets a trap, and every trap they escape teaches them that denial sometimes works. Don't create the opportunity.

2. YOU'VE CAUGHT THEM OUT

INSTEAD OF *"You're a liar. I can't believe anything you say."*

SAY **"That was a lie. You're not a liar, but that was one, and I need to be able to trust you."**

The act can be corrected. The label gets internalised and lived up to. That distinction is the single most important thing in this section.

3. SETTING THE RULE BEFORE IT'S NEEDED

INSTEAD OF *"If you ever lie to me, you'll be in serious trouble."*

SAY **"Whatever you did, telling me is always smaller than hiding it. Always. Test me on it."**

Then honour it the first time they test you, even when it costs you. That one moment sets the terms for years, and no amount of talking replaces it.

4. THEY CONFESS SOMETHING DIFFICULT

INSTEAD OF *"I KNEW IT. How could you?"*

SAY **"Thank you for telling me. That was hard. Now let's sort it out."**

Your first three words decide whether they ever confess again. There can still be a consequence. It just comes after you've acknowledged what it took to tell you.

5. THE SMALL POINTLESS LIE

INSTEAD OF *"Why would you even lie about something so stupid?"*

SAY **"You didn't need to lie about that with me. What were you worried I'd do?"**

The answer to that question is usually information about your own reactions. It's uncomfortable to hear and worth hearing.

SECTION SIX

When it's a battle over salah

Keeping prayer from becoming where your conflict lives

The risk here is specific. A child who associates salah with your anger tends to keep the association long after they've stopped keeping the prayer. Guard the connection even at the temporary cost of the compliance.

1. THEY'RE REFUSING AGAIN

INSTEAD OF *"Allah is going to punish you for this."*

SAY **"Come and pray with me. Just this one, next to me."**

Using Allah as your enforcement mechanism attaches fear of Him to your frustration with them. Praying alongside them works better than instructing them from another room, at every age.

2. THE DAILY NEGOTIATION

INSTEAD OF *"Have you prayed? Have you prayed? Why haven't you prayed?"*

SAY **"Maghrib's in ten minutes. I'm going to make wudu."**

An announcement of your own action rather than an interrogation of theirs. Repeated questioning turns prayer into surveillance, and children resist surveillance instinctively.

3. THE PRAYER WAS RUSHED AND CARELESS

INSTEAD OF *"You call that a prayer? Do it again properly."*

SAY **"You prayed. That's the main thing. Tomorrow let's slow the sujood down together."**

Habit first, excellence after. A child forced to repeat a prayer as a punishment learns something about salah you don't want them learning.

4. THE OLDER CHILD WHO'S STOPPED ENTIRELY

INSTEAD OF *"As long as you live in my house, you pray."*

SAY **"I'm not going to fight you about this every day. But I want to know what's actually going on, and I'm not going to be angry about the answer."**

Some children this age aren't rejecting the prayer. They're testing whether your love is conditional on it. Fighting daily hands them exactly the leverage they were looking for.

5. THEY ASKED A HARD QUESTION ABOUT RELIGION

INSTEAD OF *"Don't ask things like that. That's from shaytan."*

SAY **"That's a real question. I don't have the full answer. Let's find someone who does."**

A question shut down doesn't disappear. It just gets asked somewhere else, by someone with an agenda. That they brought it to you is the thing to protect.

SECTION SEVEN

When they're melting down

Lowering the temperature instead of matching it

1. FULL TANTRUM, YOUNGER CHILD

INSTEAD OF *"Stop crying right now or I'll give you something to cry about."*

SAY **"You're upset. I'm here. Tell me when you're ready."**

A child in full flood can't process instructions, so commands during a meltdown only add noise. Presence without pressure shortens it faster than anything you can say.

2. THE TANTRUM IS IN PUBLIC

INSTEAD OF *"Everyone is looking at you. Stop embarrassing me."*

SAY **"We're going outside for a minute. Come."**

Making them responsible for your embarrassment adds shame to a state they already can't control. Remove them from the audience rather than pointing it out.

3. THE WHINING THAT WON'T END

INSTEAD OF *"Stop that noise. I can't stand it."*

SAY **"I can't understand you in that voice. Try your normal one and I'll listen properly."**

You've given a clear condition and a promise attached to it, rather than a rejection they have to guess their way out of.

4. CRYING OVER SOMETHING SMALL

INSTEAD OF *"It's not even a big deal. Why are you crying?"*

SAY **"It matters to you. I understand."**

Telling a child their feeling is disproportionate doesn't shrink the feeling. It teaches them not to bring you the next one.

5. AFTERWARDS, WHEN IT'S OVER

INSTEAD OF *"See? All that for nothing."*

SAY **"You calmed yourself down. That's hard to do. What helped?"**

Naming the recovery rather than the collapse builds the skill you actually want. And their answer tells you what to reach for next time.

SECTION EIGHT

When it's school and homework

Addressing effort without attacking their worth

1. THE BAD RESULT

INSTEAD OF *"What is this? Do you want to end up with nothing?"*

SAY **"Talk me through what happened here. I'm not angry, I want to understand it."**

Fear of the result-day reaction is one of the main reasons children hide reports and forge signatures. You want the information more than you want the outburst.

2. THE HOMEWORK ISN'T DONE, AGAIN

INSTEAD OF *"You're going to fail and it will be your own fault."*

SAY **"This isn't getting done at this time of day. When would actually work?"**

Treat it as a scheduling failure first, because it usually is. Most homework battles are about the hour, the hunger, and the noise in the room.

3. THEY SAY THEY'RE STUPID

INSTEAD OF *"Don't be silly, you're very clever."*

SAY **"This part is hard for you right now. That's different from being stupid. Show me where it stops making sense."**

Blanket reassurance is easy to dismiss because they have evidence against it. Naming the specific difficulty is believable, and it leads somewhere.

4. THE TEACHER HAS COMPLAINED

INSTEAD OF *"You've disgraced me in front of your teacher."*

SAY **"I heard from your teacher. I want your side before I decide anything."**

Hearing them first costs you nothing and buys a great deal. A child who believes you'll always side against them stops bringing you anything.

5. GOOD MARKS, AND YOU WANT TO ENCOURAGE MORE

INSTEAD OF *"You're so clever, well done."*

SAY **"You worked at this for two weeks and it showed. That's the part I'm proud of."**

Praising the effort rather than the ability keeps them willing to attempt hard things. Children praised for being clever often start avoiding anything that might prove otherwise.

SECTION NINE

After you've already lost your temper

The repair matters more than the avoidance

You'll lose your temper. Everyone does. What separates households isn't whether it happens, it's whether anything is done afterward. A child who sees rupture followed by repair learns something valuable that a child in a house of permanent calm never gets the chance to learn.

1. AN HOUR LATER, WHEN IT'S QUIET

INSTEAD OF *Saying nothing and hoping it passes*

SAY **"I shouted at you earlier. That was wrong of me. I'm sorry."**

Full stop. No justification attached, no "but if you had listened". The moment you add the condition, you've taken the apology back and they know it.

2. YOU SAID SOMETHING YOU CAN'T UNSAY

INSTEAD OF *"I didn't mean it. You know I didn't mean it."*

SAY **"What I said about you was not true, and it was cruel. I want you to hear me say that it was not true."**

A child will hold a cruel sentence for years unless it's specifically retracted. Vague reassurance doesn't reach it. Name the thing and contradict it directly.

3. THEY'RE STILL WITHDRAWN AFTERWARDS

INSTEAD OF *"I said sorry. What more do you want?"*

SAY **"You don't have to be fine with it yet. I'll be here."**

Demanding immediate forgiveness makes the apology about relieving your own guilt. Let them take their time, and stay present while they do.

4. YOU WANT TO EXPLAIN YOURSELF

INSTEAD OF *"I only reacted like that because you pushed me."*

SAY **"You were wrong about the phone. I was wrong about how I handled it. Both are true."**

Holding both keeps the discipline intact while owning your part. You don't have to choose between correcting them and being honest about yourself.

5. YOU WANT IT TO BE DIFFERENT GOING FORWARD

INSTEAD OF *"It won't happen again, I promise."*

SAY **"I'm working on this. If I shout again, you can tell me, and I won't punish you for saying it."**

Don't promise perfection you can't deliver, because breaking it costs you more than the original loss of temper did. Give them permission to name it instead.

SECTION TEN

When things are going well

The sentences that build what you draw on later

This section exists because correction only works in a relationship with something in it. These are deposits. The ones above are withdrawals.

1. NOTHING IN PARTICULAR IS HAPPENING

INSTEAD OF *Only speaking to them when something needs correcting*

SAY **"Come and sit with me for a bit. No reason."**

If every conversation you initiate is about a problem, your approach itself starts to signal trouble. Some contact has to be for nothing.

2. THEY DID SOMETHING ORDINARY AND GOOD

INSTEAD OF *"Good boy."*

SAY **"You gave your sister the bigger piece. I saw that."**

Specific and observed. Al-Ghazali held that a child who does something praiseworthy should be honoured for it before others. Generic praise gives them nothing to repeat.

3. YOU WANT THEM TO KNOW WHERE THEY STAND

INSTEAD OF *Assuming they already know*

SAY **"There's nothing you could do that would make me stop wanting you here."**

Say this while things are calm, not as a rescue during a crisis. Said in advance, it's the thing they'll reach for at fifteen when they've done something they're afraid to tell you.

4. THEY TRIED SOMETHING AND IT DIDN'T WORK

INSTEAD OF *"Never mind. Maybe it wasn't for you."*

SAY **"You went for it. Most people wouldn't have. What did you learn?"**

Protecting their willingness to try is worth more over a lifetime than protecting them from any single failure.

5. AT NIGHT, BEFORE THEY SLEEP

INSTEAD OF *"Go to sleep. It's late."*

SAY **"What was the best bit of today?" Then listen to the answer properly.**

Two minutes at the end of the day, done consistently, is where children volunteer the things they'd never say if you asked directly. It's the cheapest access you'll ever get.

Pick three and stop there

You've now read fifty sentences, and if you try to use fifty sentences you'll use none of them. That's not pessimism, it's just how new habits work under pressure.

So pick three. From the section that matches what actually happens in your house, not the section you wish applied to you. Write them somewhere you'll see them. Say them out loud a few times when nothing is going wrong, because a sentence you've only read isn't available to you at the moment you need it, and a sentence you've said out loud is.

Expect a strange thing to happen the first few times. You'll say the right words and they'll come out sounding wooden, and you'll feel like you're performing rather than parenting. That's normal and it passes. Every replacement habit feels borrowed before it feels like yours.

And when you use the old sentence anyway, which you will, go and look at Section Nine. The repair is not a consolation prize for failing at the rest of this. It's the most valuable section in the guide, and a child who watches a parent own a mistake learns something no calm household can teach.

Your three for this week.

Write them here, or on a card by the kettle. Just three.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

And speak to people in a good way.

Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:83

NUR AL-QALAM DAR

A companion guide to *Discipline Without Damage*