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IMPLEMENTATION MATERIAL

READY-TO-USE SCRIPTS FOR ADULTS

Short sentences for everyday and difficult situations · Understanding Behaviour in the Early Years · A printable and editable resource for adults

How to use this quick reference sheet

Do not learn all the sentences by heart. Choose three to five messages that the adults working with the child will use consistently.

The greater the child's tension, the shorter the message should be. When distress is high, a child usually cannot process long explanations.

Say the message calmly, briefly and in the same way each time. Give the child time to respond before repeating the instruction.

1. Simple instructions and getting started

Use short sentences. One instruction at a time. Add a gesture or a picture if needed.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The child has not started the task yet	"Take a crayon." "Put the block here." "Sit here."	Do not start with a long explanation. First show the child what to do.
The child needs a first step	"First, one block." "Let's do the first step." "I'll show you. Then you try."	The first step should be small and doable.
The child does not respond straight away	"I'll wait." "Take a moment." "Show me when you're ready."	Do not step in too quickly. Give time to process the information.

2. Advance warning of a change of activity

Change activities calmly and with advance warning. Use the same wording for several days.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The end of play	"Two more blocks, then we tidy up." "One more turn, then we finish."	Give the warning before the end – not only at the moment the activity is stopped.
Moving on to the next activity	"First, tidy up. Then, lunch." "First, toilet. Then, playground."	You can use a "first–then" board.
A change of plan	"There is a change today." "First, I'll show you what is changing."	Name the change first. Then show what stays predictable.

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3. Choice within clear limits

Offer the child agency within safe, clear limits.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The child is not joining the activity	"Would you like the car or the hoop?" "Would you like the red crayon or the blue one?"	Do not offer a choice you cannot accept.
The child needs a sense of control	"You can choose the first card." "You can choose what we start with."	Give a small decision that does not derail the whole activity.
The child finds the task hard	"We'll do a small part." "Choose: shall we start here or here?"	The choice is there to help the child into the task, not to add pressure.

4. Boundaries and safety

A boundary can be calm, clear and caring. It does not have to be shouting or punishment.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The child hits or pushes	"I can see this is hard. I won't let you hit." "I'm keeping everyone safe."	Safety first. Then look for the reason behind the behaviour. If physical intervention is ever needed for immediate safety, follow the setting's safeguarding and physical intervention or positive-handling policy, or the local equivalent.
The child throws objects	"Blocks are used for building." "The block goes here." "You can squeeze the ball."	Offer a simple alternative. Do not hold a long conversation while tension is high.
The child hears "no"	"I can't agree to that." "I can see this is hard." "I'm here with you."	Distress or anger after hearing "no" does not mean the boundary was wrong. Keep an eye on safety.

5. Breaks, regulation and overload

Offer a break early, before tension escalates.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
You see the first signs of tension	"I can see this is hard for you." "Would you like a break, or would you like to stay here with some space?"	Offer a choice of two options. Do not overwhelm the child with questions.
The child is overloaded by sensory input	"It's too loud here." "Let's go somewhere quiet for a moment."	Name the situation in simple language. Reduce the input.
The child needs movement	"Please take this card over there." "Please hand out the crayons." "Please carry the box."	Movement can be a support if it comes before escalation – not only after distress has already escalated.

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6. Supporting the child's communication

Help the child communicate a need before tension escalates into shouting, pushing or running off.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The child wants something but is not communicating it clearly yet	"Show me what you want." "You can point." "Show me the card."	Communication is not only speech. A gesture, pointing or a picture is a message too.
The child wants a break	"Show me the break card." "You can say or show 'stop'."	Practise the message outside a crisis, so the child can use it in a difficult situation.
The child grabs a toy	"You can say, 'my turn'." "Show me 'I want'." "In a moment, it's your turn."	Model the simple message first. Only then expect the child to use it.

7. Turn-taking and waiting

Practise short turn-taking. Do not start with long waits.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
Taking turns in play	"My turn." "Your turn." "Now me, then you."	Repeat the same message across many games.
The child grabs an object	"Wait. It's my turn now." "Your turn is next."	The wait should be short and manageable.
The child finds waiting in the queue hard	"Today you are second in the queue." "Next time, third." "We are practising waiting."	Grade the difficulty. Do not move the child straight to the end of the queue.

8. Specific praise and small successes

Praise specific behaviour. Avoid a general "you're being good".

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
The child waited	"You waited for your turn. That helped."	Name exactly what you want to reinforce.
The child tried the task	"I can see you tried." "You took the first step."	Do not wait for full success. Notice and reinforce the attempt.
The child used a regulation strategy	"You used your break. That helped." "You managed to come back."	Notice the strategy the child used, not just the end of the difficult situation.

9. After a difficult situation

Talk about a difficult situation only once the child is calmer.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
After distress	"That was hard for you." "Now you are safe." "We can try the break card next time."	Describe the situation briefly. Do not shame the child.
Practising the agreed strategy	"Next time, show me the break card." "Let's try it now."	Practise briefly, specifically and in calm conditions.
Returning to the group	"We'll go back together." "I'm right here." "We'll start with a small step."	Do not hold a long debrief in front of the whole group.

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10. Explaining adjustments to the group

Children often ask why someone has a squeeze ball, a break or other support. Answer simply and without labelling.

Situation	Say it briefly	Note for the adult
A child has a squeeze ball or a fidget spinner	"It helps them stay with the group." "Everyone needs different help sometimes."	Do not compare: "they can't do it like you can".
A child goes out for a break	"They need a quiet moment now." "They can come back to us in a little while."	Do not share the details of a difficult situation with the group.
A child has a different version of the task	"Everyone learns a little differently." "This is the task that helps them right now."	Reinforce that adjustments are a normal part of the group.

11. What to avoid – and what to say instead

Instead of	Better to say
"Calm down right now."	"I can see this is hard for you. I'm right here."
"Why are you doing this again?"	"Something is hard. Let's try a break."
"Be good."	"Sit here." / "Wait for your turn."
"Stop being disruptive."	"Your body needs movement. Please take this card over there."
"There's no reason to cry."	"I can see this is hard." / "I can see you're upset."
"If you keep shouting, you'll go out."	"A break is available. I can help you use the break card."

12. Choose your messages for the coming week

☐ We choose three to five sentences that the adults working with the child will use.

☐ We agree exactly when we use them.

☐ We do not change the wording every day. The child needs repetition.

☐ After a week, we check which messages seem to be helping and which need simplifying.

☐ If the child is not responding, we check: the length of the message, the sensory input, the time given to respond, and how difficult the situation is for the child.

Remember

A short message does not mean a cold one. You can speak briefly, calmly and with care.

In a difficult situation, the aim is not to win an argument – it is safety, regulation and reconnection.

Safety note

If behaviour puts the child or others at immediate risk, follow the setting's safeguarding and physical intervention or positive-handling policy, or the local equivalent. Physical intervention should only be used as a last resort for immediate safety and only by appropriately trained staff.

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