

What to Say Tonight

Ready-to-Use Scripts for Tech Conversations

These scripts help you start tricky conversations with confidence. Adapt the language to match your child's age and your family's style. The goal is connection, not confrontation.

Scenario 1: They Want a New App or Social Media

The Ask

"Mom/Dad, everyone at school has TikTok/Snapchat/Discord. Can I get it too?"

What to Say

START WITH CURIOSITY:

"Tell me more about this app. Tell me a little about how you play and how you win or pass the levels?"

THEN INVESTIGATE TOGETHER:

"Let's research it together tonight. We'll look at the age rating, read some parent reviews, and see what privacy settings it has. If we both feel good about it and can agree on some rules, we can try it out."

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS:

"If I say yes, here's what I need: your account stays private, I get to follow you, and we check the privacy settings together. And if something uncomfortable happens, you come to me right away. Deal?"

If You Need to Say No

"I appreciate you asking instead of just downloading it. After looking into it, I'm not comfortable with [specific reason: data privacy, age requirement, content]. Let's double back on this in [6 months/when you're older]. In the meantime, what about [alternative]?"

Scenario 2: You Found Something Concerning

The Situation

You discovered inappropriate messages, concerning search history, or troubling content on their device.

What to Say

STAY CALM (even if you're panicking inside):

"Hey, can we talk for a minute? I saw [something specific] on your device, and I'm concerned. I'm not angry—I just want to understand what's going on."

LISTEN FIRST:

"Help me understand how this happened. Were you looking for something specific? Did someone send this to you? I promise you won't be in trouble for telling me the truth."

EXPLAIN YOUR CONCERN:

"I'm worried because [explain age-appropriately why this is unsafe/concerning]. My job as your parent is to keep you safe, and that includes online."

PROBLEM-SOLVE TOGETHER:

"Here's what we need to do together: [specific action]. And moving forward, [new rule or boundary]. I need you to know you can always come to me if something online makes you uncomfortable, even if you think you'll get in trouble. Hearing it from you first makes me feel better than finding out on my own or from someone else"

For Younger Kids (Ages 6-10)

"I noticed you saw something on the internet that's meant for grown-ups. That must have been confusing or maybe even scary. Can you tell me about it? I'm not mad—I just want to make sure you're okay and know what to do if you see something like that again."

Scenario 3: Excessive Screen Time / Won't Get Off Device

The Challenge

Constant battles over putting devices away. Screens are interfering with sleep, homework, or family time.

What to Say

EMPATHIZE WITH THE STRUGGLE:

"I know it's really hard to stop when you're in the middle of a game or watching something fun. Apps and games are made to keep your attention on them and want to use them more and more . That's literally what the companies who make them get paid for."

NAME THE REAL ISSUE:

"Here's what I'm noticing: you're staying up too late, you're more irritable, and we barely see each other anymore. I miss you. And I'm worried that screens are replacing things that matter — like sleep, playing games with family or friends, and face-to-face time with people you care about."

PROPOSE A SOLUTION TOGETHER:

"Let's come up with a plan that works for both of us. What if we set specific times for gaming/social media, and then set other times for homework, family, and winding down before bed? You tell me what feels fair, and we'll try it for a week. If it doesn't work, we adjust."

Using a Timer Trick

"I'm going to set a 10-minute timer. When it goes off, that's your cue to find a stopping point - finish the round, save your game, or bookmark where you are. Then device goes on the charger until [tomorrow/after homework/etc.]. Sound good?"

Scenario 4: Cyberbullying (Your Child is the Victim)

The Discovery

Your child tells you they're being bullied online, or you discover mean messages/comments directed at them.

What to Say

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS:

"I'm so glad you told me. What they said/did is not okay, and you did nothing to deserve this. This is really hard, and I'm here to help you through it."

TAKE EVIDENCE:

"Let's take screenshots of everything so we have a record. Don't respond to them or delete anything yet, we need to gather evidence if we need to involve the school or this platform."

DISCUSS OPTIONS:

"Here's what we can do: 1) Block this person immediately, 2) Report them to the platform, 3) Talk to the school if it involves classmates, 4) Take a break from this app for a while. What feels right to you?"

Follow-Up Support

"I want to check in with you every day this week about how you're feeling. Remember: their words say everything about them and nothing about you. And if this continues or gets worse, we're taking bigger action together."

Scenario 5: Introducing a Family Tech Charter

The Conversation

You want to establish ground rules before problems arise.

What to Say

FRAME IT AS A TEAM EFFORT:

"Technology is a huge part of our lives, and I want us to use it in a way that's healthy for everyone in this family—including me. So let's create some agreements together."

MAKE IT COLLABORATIVE:

"I have some ideas about screen-free times and privacy rules, but I want to hear your ideas too. What matters most to you about how we use tech at home?"

ACKNOWLEDGE IT'S A WORK IN PROGRESS:

"This isn't about being perfect—it's about figuring out what works for us. We'll try it for a month, see how it goes, and adjust if we need to. And these rules apply to all of us, not just you kids."

Quick Tips for All Conversations

- ✓ Choose calm moments, not heated ones
- ✓ Ask more questions than you make statements
- ✓ Acknowledge when you don't know something ('I'm learning too')
- ✓ Be specific about behavior, not judgmental about character
- ✓ End with connection: 'I love you and we are a team'
- ✓ Follow up the next day to check in

Remember: The goal isn't perfection. It's progress and connection.

Smart Tech Kids • Building Confident Digital Citizens