



Conversation Safety Scripts for Families

How to have hard conversations without triggering shutdown or RSD

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Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

Hard conversations don't usually go wrong because the topic is bad. They go wrong because **the nervous system feels unsafe**.

When threat shows up, people:

- defend or escalate
- shut down or withdraw
- hear rejection instead of information
- lose access to language or reasoning

These scripts help lower threat **before** the content lands.

First: two grounding principles

1. **Safety before truth**
If the nervous system doesn't feel safe, truth won't be heard.
2. **Tone and timing matter more than wording**
Even kind words can land as threat if the moment isn't right.

You're aiming for **enough safety**, not perfect agreement.

Step 1. Ask permission before starting

(This alone prevents many blow-ups)

Starting without warning often triggers RSD or shutdown.

Scripts

- "Can I check something with you when you have the energy?"
- "Is now an okay time to talk about something a bit tricky?"
- "This isn't urgent... we can do it later if that's better."

If the answer is "not now," believe it.
That *is* cooperation.

Step 2. Name safety and intent clearly

Never assume your care is obvious. Say it out loud.

Scripts

- “You’re not in trouble.”
- “This isn’t about blame.”
- “I’m not angry... I just want to understand.”
- “I care about you and our relationship.”

This helps the nervous system stand down.

Step 3. Limit the scope

(One topic. One moment.)

Multiple points feel like attack.

Scripts

- “I want to focus on one small thing.”
- “This will take about five minutes.”
- “We don’t have to solve everything.”

Containment reduces overwhelm.

Step 4. Describe, don’t interpret

Stick to **what happened**, not what it means.

Instead of

- “You never listen.”
- “You were being rude.”

Try

- “Yesterday, I didn’t get a response to my message.”
- “Your voice got louder, and I felt unsure what was happening.”

Facts feel safer than judgements.

Step 5. Name impact without accusation

Impact matters... but blame escalates.

Scripts

- “That left me feeling confused.”
- “I felt a bit shut out.”
- “It made things harder to sort out.”

Avoid:

- “You made me feel...”
- “You always do this...”

Step 6. Pause for regulation

(This is not avoidance)

If you notice:

- silence
- tension
- tears
- anger
- withdrawal

Say one of these:

- “Let’s pause for a moment.”
- “I think this might be getting heavy.”
- “We can slow this down.”

Pausing **prevents rupture.**

Step 7. Invite collaboration gently

Only if there’s capacity.

Scripts

- “What would help this feel easier next time?”
- “Is there a way we could handle this that feels safer for you?”
- “Would it help to do this differently?”

This keeps the conversation relational, not corrective.

Step 8. Close clearly and kindly

Don't leave the nervous system hanging.

Scripts

- "I'm really glad we talked."
- "We don't need to fix everything today."
- "We're okay."

Clear endings matter more than perfect outcomes.

What to say *instead* when emotions spike

If someone shuts down

- "You don't have to talk right now."
- "I'm here when you're ready."
- "We can come back to this later."

If RSD is activated

- "I'm not rejecting you."
- "This isn't about you being bad."
- "I care... even while we're sorting this."

If anger shows up

- "I hear that this feels really important."
 - "Let's slow this down so we don't hurt each other."
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What often makes things worse (even with good intentions)

- "Calm down."
- "You're overreacting."
- "I'm just being honest."
- "This shouldn't be a big deal."
- Talking louder or faster
- Continuing when someone has shut down

These escalate threat... even if you're right.

If the conversation doesn't go well

That doesn't mean you failed.

Repair can come later:

- "I think that was too much earlier."
- "I want to try again when we're calmer."
- "I didn't mean to hurt you."

Repair builds trust more than getting it right first time.

Gentle reminders for parents & partners

- You are not responsible for managing someone else's emotions
 - You *are* responsible for how you bring things up
 - Pausing is a strength
 - Care can be quiet
 - Connection matters more than winning
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Closing note

Hard conversations don't need to feel like emergencies.

When safety leads, people can stay present...
and even difficult truths can land without breaking connection.

You're not trying to avoid hard things.
You're learning how to **walk through them together**.

That's real support.