



FREE GUIDE 02 • FOR FAMILIES

What Can I Say to My Child Tonight?

Words and small moments for parents after leaving an abusive situation. You are allowed to be honest without asking your child to carry adult details.

If you are reading this exhausted, you are not doing it wrong. Children need a caring adult who keeps showing up, not a perfect speech.

Start with three truths

“What happened was not your fault.” “The adults are working on keeping us safe.” “You can ask me questions, and it is okay to have many feelings.”

Words for different ages

Young children

“Some things at home were not safe. We are somewhere safer now. You did not cause this. I am here with you.”

School-age children

“You may feel sad, angry, relieved, or confused. You can love someone and still know their behavior was not okay. We can talk a little at a time.”

Teens

“I will tell you the truth in a way that respects you. You do not have to take sides or be my counselor. I want to hear what this has been like for you and what would help you feel safer.”



When the hard questions come

“Is it my fault?”

“No. Nothing you said or did caused an adult to hurt or frighten someone.”

“Will it happen again?”

“I cannot promise that nothing scary will ever happen. I can promise that I am taking steps to help keep us safe and that you can tell me when you are worried.”

“Why do I miss them?”

“It makes sense to miss someone and still feel hurt by what happened. Both feelings can be true.”

Try one small routine

A familiar bedtime story, a snack together, a short walk, or letting your child choose between two safe options can restore a bit of predictability. Listen more than you explain. If your child does not want to talk, leave the door open without pressing.

For the parent who is barely holding it together

Try: “I am having a hard feeling, but I am taking care of it with other adults. You do not need to fix it for me.”
Your child can see that feelings are real without becoming responsible for yours.

If your child needs more support

If distress is persistent, worsening, or affecting daily life, consider talking with a pediatrician or a qualified child mental-health professional. A domestic violence advocate can help with safety planning for children. Peer support can be a place for you to feel heard; it is not a substitute for your child’s clinical care.

This is educational peer-support information, not individualized safety, medical, mental-health, or legal advice. If you are in immediate danger in the U.S., call 911. For confidential domestic violence support, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) or thehotline.org. If you or someone else is in a mental-health crisis in the U.S., call or text 988. Use a safer device if someone may monitor yours.

Sources: thehotline.org/resources/safety-planning-with-children/ • childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-after-a-traumatic-event/