

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They won't put their shoes on.

QUICK USE

Say it once. Offer the choice. Follow through.

START It's time to put your shoes on.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you don't want to stop playing.

DIRECTION We're leaving now. You can walk or I can carry you.

WHY IT HELPS

A clear choice inside a firm limit helps you move forward without arguing.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They refuse to turn off the screen.

QUICK USE

Say it once. Turn it off. Don't debate.

START Okay, screen time is done.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you wanted more.

DIRECTION We need to turn it off now.

WHY IT HELPS

Stating the limit without negotiating prevents drawn-out power struggles.

AFTER IT'S OVER

That was hard. We're okay. Want a hug or some space?

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They ignore you when you call them.

QUICK USE

Get close. Say it once. Wait. Then act.

START I need you to come to me.

ACKNOWLEDGE I see you're busy.

DIRECTION Pause that and come now.

WHY IT HELPS

Direct, simple language reduces repetition and signals follow-through.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They refuse to clean up when asked.

QUICK USE

Start small. Point to the first step. Stay with it.

START It's time to clean up now.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you don't feel like it.

DIRECTION Where do you want to start, books or toys.

WHY IT HELPS

Breaking it down lowers resistance without removing the expectation.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They keep hitting after been told to stop.

QUICK USE

Stop it. Block if needed. Separate if needed.

START Hey, we don't hit.

ACKNOWLEDGE I can tell you're angry.

DIRECTION I won't let you hit. If you do, we take a break.

WHY IT HELPS

Clear, calm words stop it fast — without you having to raise your voice.

AFTER IT'S OVER

Hands have to stay safe. I'm still here with you.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

Time for bed, they keep getting out of bed.

QUICK USE

Repeat. Keep it boring. Return them to bed.

START It's time for bed.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you don't want to sleep.

DIRECTION It's bedtime and you have to stay in bed and go to sleep.

WHY IT HELPS

Keeping it the same helps bedtime stop turning into a debate.

AFTER IT'S OVER

You're safe. I love you. It's time to sleep.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They are refusing to get in the car.

QUICK USE

Give the direction once. Help them in if needed.

START It's time to get in the car.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you don't want to

DIRECTION You can climb in or I'll help you in.

WHY IT HELPS

Calm follow-through prevents escalation.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm glad we're together.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They stall when it's time to brush teeth.

QUICK USE

Keep it short. Move to the bathroom. Start together.

START It's time to brush your teeth.

ACKNOWLEDGE You would rather keep playing.

DIRECTION Bathroom now, let's go.

WHY IT HELPS

Short direction reduces back-and-forth debate.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They are refusing to get dressed.

QUICK USE

Offer one small choice. Then move forward.

START It's time to get dressed.

ACKNOWLEDGE I get you don't want to.

DIRECTION We are getting dressed. You choose the shirt.

WHY IT HELPS

A small choice helps them cooperate without changing the outcome.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They don't want to leave a friend's house.

QUICK USE

Give the leaving line once. Start moving. Don't linger.

START It's time to get going.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you're having fun.

DIRECTION We have to leave now.

WHY IT HELPS

Clear transitions prevent lingering negotiations.

AFTER IT'S OVER

It's hard to leave. I'm glad we're together in the car.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They are whining after you said no.

QUICK USE

Don't explain again. Repeat the same answer. End it.

START I've already answered.

ACKNOWLEDGE I can see you're disappointed.

DIRECTION The answer is still no.

WHY IT HELPS

Repetition without escalation shows the answer isn't changing.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They won't stop the rough playing.

QUICK USE

Pause it early. Stop the playing if it continues.

START Time to Pause.

ACKNOWLEDGE I can see you're excited.

DIRECTION If it continues, we stop.

WHY IT HELPS

Calm interruption resets behavior without adding emotion.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We can try again when your body is ready for safe play.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They are refusing to share.

QUICK USE

State “turns.” Enforce the turn. Stay neutral.

START Stop.

ACKNOWLEDGE You don't want to share.

DIRECTION We take turns.

WHY IT HELPS

When the rule is simple, there's less fighting.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They keep talking over you / interrupting.

QUICK USE

Hold your hand up. Finish your sentence. Then listen.

START Wait.

ACKNOWLEDGE I know you have something to say.

DIRECTION I will listen when I'm done talking.

WHY IT HELPS

A clear choice inside a firm limit helps you move forward without arguing.

AFTER IT'S OVER *We're okay. I'm here.*

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They keep testing the same boundary.

QUICK USE

Repeat the same boundary. No new words. No negotiating.

START We've already talked about this.

ACKNOWLEDGE Your hoping I'll change my mind.

DIRECTION The answer is still no.

WHY IT HELPS

A clear choice inside a firm limit helps you move forward without arguing.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We're okay. I'm here.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen

WHAT TO SAY WHEN

They're upset after you followed through.

QUICK USE

Stay close. Stay calm. Don't undo it.

START I know that was hard.

ACKNOWLEDGE You really wanted it to go differently.

DIRECTION This isn't changing — I'm right here with you.

WHY IT HELPS AFTER

Staying calm and close after holding a limit shows them the boundary and the relationship are both still intact. This is where the real trust gets built.

AFTER IT'S OVER

We got through it together. I'm proud of us both.

What to Say Cards | When They Don't Listen