



De-Escalating Big Emotions Script

When facing a situation where a child is becoming escalated, there are some important rules to follow as the adult supporting them. It can be most helpful to practice using a script, so that you remember it in the moments where strong emotions are running high for everyone. Here are some steps and accompanying examples:

1. Acknowledge and validate the strong feelings

- *"I can see that you're upset, and that's okay. It makes sense that you would feel that way."*

2. If the child is engaging in an unsafe behavior, set the boundary

- *"You're allowed to feel upset. You just can't throw things at other people. It's not safe."*

3. Offer your support

- *"Do you want to talk or solve a problem together? If not, that's okay too. We can start helping your brain feel better."*

4. Give choices for feeling better

- *"Remember you have a few different strategies. You could blow candle breaths, take a break, or get a hug, or you can just cry. What do you want to do?"*

5. Given them age-appropriate space and check back in

- *"I'm going to give you some space, but I will be back in [one] minute to see how you're feeling."*

6. Follow up and help them process, but only after everyone has de-escalated

- *"I can see that you're feeling better. Sometimes it's helpful to talk about it and see if there's any other problems we need to solve, but we can also let it go and move on. What do you think?"*

Remember:

- Give permission for the child to feel their emotions, avoid labeling the emotions specifically, giving acknowledgement that a big emotion is being felt is the most important.
- Don't assume there is a problem to solve. Many kids are triggered internally and/or do not know why they feel agitated.
- Pre-teach calming strategies when the child is calm, happy and regulated. This way they will be more able to access them when feeling a big emotion.
- If you have a calm down space, don't force the child to use it, as that can start to feel punitive. Offer it as an option only.
- Stay close and available, and if the child asks you not to leave, honor their request. If you do give them space, make sure you check back in after a short period of time.
- When a child is escalated, that is **not** the time to teach them something or process their feelings. That part of their brain is not available when they're upset, and usually not for at least 15-20 minutes afterwards.