

Your Possible Home

Building Meaningful, Enduring Family Bonds in the Age of AI


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Repair Scripts for Kids and Teens

Words for the moments when something has gone wrong

Conflict isn't the failure. Unrepaired conflict is. What separates families who stay close from families who slowly drift apart isn't whether hard moments happen. It's what happens after them.

These scripts give kids and parents real language to use when emotions have settled enough to come back together. They're not magic phrases. They're starting places. The point isn't to read them word for word. The point is to have something to grab when your own words have run out.

For young children (roughly three to seven)

At this age, repair is mostly about modeling. Children learn what to say by hearing you say it first.

When they've hurt someone:

"I'm sorry I hit you. Hitting hurts. Are you okay?"

"I made a mistake. I'll try again next time."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I was upset."

When they've made a mess of something (the rug, the wall, a sibling's project):

"I made a mess. I'll help clean it up."

"I broke it. I'm sorry. What can I do to help fix it?"

When they've been hurt and want repair from someone else:

"That hurt my feelings. I want to try again."

"I don't want to play that anymore."

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"Can we start over?"

Parent modeling phrases (say these out loud, often):

"I lost my patience. I'm sorry I yelled. Let me try that again."

"That came out wrong. What I meant to say was..."

"I made a mistake too. Will you forgive me?"

Children who watch parents repair learn that repair is normal, expected, and not scary.

For middle childhood (roughly eight to twelve)

This age is when repair gets more sophisticated. Kids start understanding that "sorry" alone isn't enough. They can name what they did and why, if you give them the language.

The four-part repair (teach this and use it for years):

1. *"What I did was..."*
2. *"That probably made you feel..."*
3. *"What I should have done was..."*
4. *"Will you forgive me?"*

A real example:

"What I did was call you stupid. That probably made you feel hurt and angry. What I should have done was take a break before I said anything. Will you forgive me?"

When the apology needs to come from you, the parent:

"I yelled at you in front of your friends. That was embarrassing for you, and it wasn't okay. What I should have done was wait until we were home. I'm sorry."

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When emotions are still high and they can't apologize yet:

"I'm still upset. I'm not ready to talk yet. I'll come find you when I am."

That last one is gold. Teaching a child that they can pause repair without abandoning the other person is one of the most useful skills you'll ever teach.

For teenagers

Teens have been apologized to badly enough times to know when an apology is fake. They also know when one is real, and they respect it deeply.

The honest teen apology has three parts:

1. Naming what they did, specifically
2. Naming the impact, without minimizing
3. Saying what they'll do differently, with no excuse-stacking

Examples:

"I lied to you about where I was. I get that you can't trust me right now, and I have to earn that back. I'm not going to do that again."

"I was a jerk to her at dinner. I'm going to apologize to her tonight and I'm not going to do it like that again."

"I shouldn't have slammed the door. I was overwhelmed and I took it out on you. I'm sorry."

When parents need to apologize to teens (this matters more than people realize):

"You were right. I overreacted. I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions before I heard you out."

"I shouldn't have said that in front of your sibling. That wasn't fair to either of you."

"I'm working on this. I'm not always going to get it right. Thank you for telling me when I don't."

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Teens who hear genuine apologies from their parents become adults who know how to give them.

What to say when emotions are still high (and repair isn't possible yet)

Sometimes the right move is to wait. These are scripts for the *not yet* moment.

For a child:

"I'm too upset to talk right now. I'm going to take a break. I'll come back."

"My body needs to calm down before my words can come out right."

For a parent:

"I love you, and I need a few minutes to settle down before we talk."

"I'm not ready yet. I want to do this right, and I can't right now."

"Let's both take a break. We'll come back to this."

The unspoken rule: if you say *"I'll come back,"* you have to come back. Otherwise the script becomes avoidance, and avoidance is its own kind of damage.

Repair without shame

The line between accountability and shame is finer than people realize. Accountability sounds like *"What you did was hurtful, and here's how you can repair it."* Shame sounds like *"You're a hurtful person, and you should feel bad about who you are."* The first builds character. The second damages it.

A few phrases that hold accountability without slipping into shame:

"You're a kind kid who made an unkind choice. Let's make it right."

"This isn't who you are. It's something you did. We can fix it."

"I'm not mad at you. I'm bothered by what happened. There's a difference."

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"Mistakes aren't who you are. How you handle them is."

One small reframe

Repair isn't a script. It's a culture. The scripts above are training wheels. Use them when you need them. Eventually, you and your kids will find your own words. The phrases will become natural, almost invisible. By the time your children are grown, repair will be something your family does without thinking, the way some families say grace before dinner.

That's the goal. Not perfect words. A family where coming back together is just what we do.