

# Your Possible Home

Building Meaningful, Enduring Family Bonds in the Age of AI

  
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## Step-by-Step DIY Prompt Pack

This is the resource readers will actually use mid-project, standing in front of a problem with a phone in one hand and a wrench in the other. The original draft had the right prompts, but it presented them as a flat list of templates. What's missing is the why — when to reach for which prompt, and what good and bad inputs look like. A prompt without context is just words to copy, and the teen or parent using it learns nothing about why one phrasing works better than another.

The version below keeps the prompts copy-pasteable but builds the thinking around them, so by the third or fourth project, readers stop needing the page at all because they've internalized how the prompts work.

### Before you reach for a prompt

Take thirty seconds to do something AI can't do for you, which is *describe what you're actually looking at*. Most bad AI responses come from vague prompts, and most vague prompts come from skipping this step. Before typing anything, name out loud or in your head what you see, what you hear, what's leaking or sparking or refusing to start, and what's already been tried. The clearer the picture in your own head, the better the prompt that comes out of it.

A quick rule: if you can't describe the problem to a friend in two sentences, you can't describe it well to AI yet.

### The diagnosis prompt

Use this when something has gone wrong and you don't yet know what's causing it. The goal is a short list of likely causes ranked by probability, not a deep dive into any one of them.

*I'm troubleshooting a home or vehicle issue. Here's what I'm seeing: [describe symptoms]. What are the likely causes, what should I check first, and what would rule out the most serious problems?*

The phrase *rule out the most serious problems* is doing important work in this prompt. Without it, AI tends to give you a balanced list of possibilities. With it, AI prioritizes the safety-relevant checks first,

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which is what you actually want when you don't know whether you're dealing with a clogged drain or a leaking gas line.

## The safety check prompt

Use this *before* you start any repair, not in the middle of one. The whole point is to surface safety steps before you've already created a problem.

*Before I proceed with this repair, what safety steps should I take, what shutoffs or protections should I verify, and when should I stop and call a professional?*

The last clause matters. Without explicitly asking when to stop, AI tends toward encouraging you forward. With the question included, you get a real answer about where the line is — and most of the time, that line is further out than people fear, which is reassuring in itself.

## The step validation prompt

Use this when you're partway through a project and the next step feels uncertain. The instinct to skip this and just keep going is exactly when you need it most.

*Here's what I've done so far: [steps taken]. Here's what I plan to do next: [next step]. Please confirm whether this is safe, whether the order is correct, and whether there's a simpler approach I'm missing.*

The last question — *is there a simpler approach I'm missing* — saves more projects than the other two combined. People who are halfway into a repair often forget that there might be an easier path they didn't see at the start, and AI is unusually good at spotting it.

## The teaching mode prompt

Use this when a teen is working with you and you want the explanation pitched at their level, or when you're learning a system you've never touched before and don't want jargon.

*Explain this step as if you were teaching a teenager — simple language, clear reasoning, focus on safety, no jargon.*

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This works whether or not there's an actual teenager in the room. The phrase *focus on safety* is what makes the prompt useful for adults too, because it keeps the explanation oriented toward what could go wrong instead of just what to do.

## The "is this worth DIY" prompt

Use this before you commit to a project, especially when the cost or time investment is unclear. This is the prompt that tells you whether to keep reading the prompt pack or just call someone.

*Help me decide whether to DIY this project. Compare cost, risk, learning value, and time investment, and tell me what you'd recommend given those tradeoffs.*

Asking AI directly for a recommendation — *tell me what you'd recommend* — is the part that matters. AI defaults to neutral comparisons unless asked to take a position. When you ask for a recommendation, you usually get a real one, and you can decide whether you agree.

## Two prompts that aren't in the original list but earn their place

A debugging prompt for when AI's first answer didn't help:

*That answer didn't quite fit my situation. Here's what's different: [describe what's specific to your case]. With that in mind, what would you change about your suggestion?*

Most people give up on AI after one underwhelming response. The fix isn't a better first prompt — it's a willingness to push back. AI gets noticeably better when you tell it what was off, because the second response is anchored in your actual situation rather than a general one.

A prompt for when you're done and want to remember what you learned:

*I just finished this project. Here's what I did and what I learned: [short summary]. What would you suggest I check or do differently next time? Are there any related skills worth building on this one?*

This is the prompt that turns a one-off repair into a developing skill. AI is good at pointing out related projects you'd be ready for now, and that's where the trade skill conversation with your teen has its natural sequel.

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## **A short note on what NOT to ask AI**

Three categories where AI is the wrong tool, and where you should put down the phone and either call someone or just look more carefully.

When the answer requires seeing something AI can't see. If the issue depends on what color a wire is, what sound the unit makes, or how a part feels when you wiggle it, describe it as best you can but trust your own senses over a generic response.

When you smell gas, see active sparking, or have water actively flooding. These aren't AI questions. Shut things off, get out, and call the appropriate emergency or service line. The prompt pack is for after you've made it safe.

When you've asked the same question three different ways and the answer keeps feeling generic. This usually means the AI doesn't have the specific detail it needs to help, and the right move is to find a forum, a manual, or a person who's worked on the exact model in front of you.

## **A printable card version**

If you want a one-card reference for the garage wall or a kitchen drawer, here's the same set of prompts stripped to their bones. Tape it somewhere visible and let the surrounding context above stay in the book or on the website.

*Diagnose:* Symptoms, likely causes, what to check first, what rules out the worst case.

*Safety check:* Steps, shutoffs, when to stop and call a pro.

*Validate next step:* What I've done, what I plan to do, is it safe and is there a simpler way.

*Teaching mode:* Explain like I'm a teenager, focus on safety.

*Worth it:* Cost, risk, learning value, time — recommend.

*Debug:* Here's what was different, change your suggestion.

*Reflect:* What I did, what I learned, what to check next time.