

# Scripts That Help at the School Gate

Ready-to-use phrases for adults supporting children with morning anxiety

These scripts are designed for children whose needs are being met at school. If a child's distress is telling us that school isn't safe or appropriate for them right now, our first priority must be addressing those needs - not using scripts to get them through the gate.

## About These Scripts

The phrases below are starting points, not rules. Use them in your own voice, adapt them to your child or school community, and trust your judgement. The goal is to have prepared language in your mental toolkit so you're not improvising from scratch when you're stressed. Consistency between parents and school staff makes a real difference - when children hear similar messages from adults on both sides of the gate, it creates safety and predictability.

These scripts work because they:

- Validate feelings rather than dismiss them
- Stay calm and confident rather than anxious or frustrated
- Keep boundaries clear whilst showing empathy
- Are brief and genuine rather than lengthy explanations
- Focus on what happens next rather than dwelling on the difficulty

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## Before You Leave Home

Preparation and connection at home can make the gate moment easier. The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to acknowledge it whilst building confidence. Avoid promises you can't keep ("it'll be fine") or minimising language ("there's nothing to worry about") - these backfire because the child knows their worry is real. Instead, validate the feeling whilst reinforcing that school is safe and you believe in them.

### What Parents Can Say:

- "I can see you're feeling worried about school today. That feeling is real, and it's okay."
- "Your body might feel uncomfortable this morning, but school is safe and the adults there will look after you."
- "We're going to leave in 10 minutes. You can do hard things, even when they feel scary."
- "I'll be thinking of you today, and I'll be right here at [specific time] to collect you."
- "Let's take three deep breaths together before we go."
- "What's one thing you're looking forward to today, even if it's something tiny?"
- "Remember, feelings change. You might feel different once you're there."

### Your own phrases that work:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**What School Staff Can Say (if applicable - e.g., via text/email to parent):**

- "Just letting you know we're ready for [child's name] this morning and will support them however they need."
- "I'll meet you at the gate and help with the transition."
- "We've got a quiet activity ready for when [child] arrives - no pressure to join in straight away."
- "If this morning is tricky, we'll handle it gently. You're not alone in this."

**Your own phrases that work:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
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## At the Gate - When They're Crying or Showing Distress

When a child is crying, they need validation first and practical support second. Scripts that name the feeling before moving to next steps work better than jumping straight to solutions. What makes things worse is anything that dismisses the feeling ("You're fine, everyone else is happy"), creates shame ("You're too old for this"), or bargains in the moment ("If you go in, I'll buy you a treat"). Keep goodbyes brief and consistent - long, drawn-out farewells often increase distress.

**Parents - What to Say:**

- "I can see this feels really hard right now. Your tears are telling me something important."
- "It's okay to feel sad about saying goodbye. I feel it too."
- "School is safe, and [teacher's name] is here to look after you. I'll be back at [time]."
- "Your body is doing exactly what bodies do when they feel worried. You're not doing anything wrong."
- "I'm going to give you one more hug, and then I'm going to leave so you can start your day."
- "I love you. I believe you can do this. See you at [time]."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents - What NOT to Say:**

- "Don't cry, you're fine" or "There's nothing to be upset about"
- "Look, everyone else is happy - why aren't you?"
- "You're too old for this" or "Big boys/girls don't cry"
- "If you don't stop crying, I'll..." [any threat]
- "You're making me late for work" or "Everyone's looking at us"

**School Staff - What to Say:**

- "Good morning [child's name], good morning [parent's name]. I can see this is a tough morning."
- "I'm here now, and I'm going to make sure you're okay."
- "It's alright to feel sad when your mum/dad leaves. Lots of children do."
- "Let's walk together, and you don't need to talk if you don't feel like it."
- "I'll stay with you until you feel settled."

- "Your mum/dad will be back at [time]. That's not changed."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**School Staff - What NOT to Say:**

- "Come on, cheer up!" or "Give me a smile!"
- "You were fine yesterday - what's wrong today?"
- "Your mum/dad needs to go now, stop being silly"
- "If you don't come in, you'll miss golden time"

## At the Gate - When They're Angry, Protesting, or Shouting

When a child is shouting or protesting, it's easy to match their energy or become defensive. Anger is often fear in disguise. The scripts that work are calm, boundaried, and brief - long explanations tend to escalate things. Stay warm but unbothered by the volume. What makes things worse is anything that sounds like a battle ("Well, you HAVE to go"), takes it personally ("Don't you dare speak to me like that"), or makes empty threats. The boundary is clear - school isn't optional - but we can still validate the feeling.

**Parents - What to Say:**

- "I can hear you're feeling really angry about going to school. I'm listening."
- "It's not a choice whether you go, but I understand you wish it was different."
- "You can feel cross with me, and you still need to go in. Both things are true."
- "I'm going to wait here for one minute whilst you get ready, then we're walking to the door."
- "I know this feels unfair. School isn't optional, but your feelings about it are valid."
- "I love you even when you're cross with me. See you later."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents - What NOT to Say:**

- "Well, you HAVE to go to school, that's the law!" [confrontational]
- "Stop shouting at me right now!"
- "Fine! We'll just go home then!" [unless you mean it]
- "Don't you dare speak to me like that"
- "You're being ridiculous/dramatic"

**School Staff - What to Say:**

- "Morning [child's name]. I can see you're having big feelings about coming in today."
- "You sound really cross. That's okay. Let's get you inside and settled."
- "I hear that you don't want to be here. School isn't optional, but I'm going to make sure today is okay for you."
- "Come with me, please. We can talk more once we're inside if you want to."
- "Your feelings are allowed. Shouting at adults isn't, but your feelings definitely are."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**School Staff - What NOT to Say:**

- "That's enough! Stop that behaviour right now!"
  - "You're being very rude"
  - "I'm not listening until you calm down"
  - "Other children manage just fine"
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## At the Gate - When They're Frozen, Shut Down, or Silent

When a child has gone silent or still, they're not being defiant - their nervous system has activated a freeze response. They literally can't "just move" in this state. Trying to force, cajole, or reason rarely works. The most helpful approach is gentle, allows time, and reduces demands. Sometimes staying quietly present without words is more supportive than talking. What makes things worse is anything that implies they're choosing this ("Just move!" or "Stop being silly"), increases pressure ("Everyone's waiting"), or involves physically moving them unless absolutely necessary.

**Parents - What to Say:**

- "I can see you've stopped. That's your body's way of trying to feel safe."
- "I'm going to stand here quietly with you for 30 seconds, then we'll try taking one step."
- "You don't need to talk. I'm just going to stay near you."
- "I'm going to start walking very slowly towards the door. Come when your body is ready."
- "Your brain has pressed pause. That's okay. It will unpause when it feels safe enough."
- [Or say nothing - just stay calm and present, breathing steadily]

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents - What NOT to Say:**

- "Come ON, just MOVE!" or "Stop being silly"
- "Why are you doing this?" or "What's wrong with you?"
- "Everyone's waiting" or "You're making us late"
- "I'm going to count to three..."
- "Fine, I'm leaving without you"

**School Staff - What to Say:**

- "Morning [child's name]. I can see you're finding it hard to move right now. That happens sometimes."
- "I'm going to stand here with you. You don't need to talk or do anything."
- "Would it help if I walked next to you, or would you rather I gave you space?"
- [After a pause] "I'm going to gently put my hand near yours. You can hold it if you want to."
- "Take your time. There's no rush."
- [To parent] "I've got this. You can go when you're ready."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**School Staff - What NOT to Say:**

- "Come along, don't be silly"
  - "Just walk - it's not hard!"
  - "We haven't got all day"
  - "You're holding everyone up"
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## **At the Gate - When They're Physically Clinging or Refusing to Move**

When a child is holding onto their parent, they're seeking safety through physical connection. Their nervous system needs proximity. Scripts need to honour this need whilst supporting the transition. For parents, staying calm in your own body (though hard!) matters more than your words - tension communicates through physical touch. For school staff, offering to be a safe person to transition to works better than trying to pull the child away. What makes things worse is anything that makes the child feel rejected ("You're too heavy," "Let go"), creates shame ("You're being a baby"), or involves trying to distract or trick them - this breaks trust.

**Parents - What to Say:**

- "I can feel you need to hold on tight. That's your body asking for safety."
- "Let's have one big squeeze together, and then I'm going to help you let go."
- "I know this feels scary. [Teacher's name] is going to look after you, and I'll be back at [time]."
- "My body is staying calm because I know you're safe. I'm breathing slowly - want to breathe with me?"
- "I'm going to pass you to [staff member] now. They're safe. I love you."
- [To staff] "They need a minute to transition. Thank you for being patient."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents - What NOT to Say:**

- "Let GO of me!" or "You're hurting me!"
- "You're too heavy" or "You're too old for this"
- "Stop being a baby"
- "I can't breathe!" [in a panicked way]

**School Staff - What to Say:**

- "Morning [child's name]. I can see you need to hold onto your mum/dad right now."
- "Would you like to hold my hand instead, or shall I just walk next to you both?"
- "I'm here when you're ready. No rush."
- "[Parent] is going to say goodbye now, and I'm going to stay right with you."
- "Shall we walk to the classroom together, or would you like to sit in the quiet room first?"
- "You're safe. I've got you."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**School Staff - What NOT to Say:**

- "Come on, let your mum/dad go"
  - "You're fine, stop making a fuss"
  - "Look, [other child] isn't crying"
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## The Handover - Parent to School Communication

The handover between parent and school staff can ease or hinder the transition. The best handover communication is brief, factual, and focuses on what the child might need rather than what they've done. A quick "Tricky morning, might need quiet time" is more useful than a long explanation. For school staff, warm acknowledgement of the parent combined with confident, friendly engagement with the child creates a bridge between worlds. Keep it short - you can follow up later if needed.

**Quick phrases for smooth handover:**

*Parent to staff:*

- "Tough morning - might need some quiet time to settle."
- "They're feeling wobbly today. Usual strategies should work."
- "Didn't sleep well last night - just wanted you to know."
- "Had a wobble in the car but calmed down. Might be fragile."
- "Really struggled this morning - can you text me when they're settled?"
- "This is the third hard morning this week - could we have a chat later?"

*Staff to parent:*

- "I've got them from here. Drive safely."
- "We'll look after them. Try not to worry."
- "I'll keep an eye and let you know how they settle."

**Your own phrases:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Making These Scripts Work for You

The phrases above are suggestions, not prescriptions. Adapt them to your voice, your child, and your situation. Some children need the same script every day for consistency; others need variety. Pay attention to what actually helps rather than what you think should help.

### Space for your notes:

What works for this child:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Phrases that make things worse for this child:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Signals that I need to stop and reassess (e.g., escalating distress, things getting worse not better):

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## When Scripts Aren't Enough

If you're using these strategies consistently and things are getting worse rather than better, that's important information. Escalating gate distress might be telling us that something needs to change at school, or that unmet needs require attention. These scripts support transitions for children whose needs are being met. If that's not the case, no amount of kind words will fix it, and our focus needs to shift to addressing what's happening once they're through that gate.

**Remember:** Your words matter, but your calm presence matters more. Consistency between home and school makes a difference. Brief and genuine is better than elaborate and false. And these scripts only work when school is genuinely safe for the child.

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