FOR FAMILIES · BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

Getting Ready for Kindergarten: 4 Phrases for Home

Four short phrases you can practice this spring and summer, so your child hears familiar words in the first weeks of school.

Kindergarten brings new rooms, new grown-ups, and a lot of waiting, sharing, and trying hard things. A few short phrases, said in calm moments at home, give a 5-year-old words to reach for later. Pick one, practice it for a few minutes a day, and repeat it in ordinary moments over the summer.

1 · AT THE CLASSROOM DOOR ON THE FIRST MORNINGS, YOUR CHILD HOLDS ON TIGHT AND DOES NOT WANT TO LET GO.

"Brave means scared and doing it anyway."

Children can come to believe that brave people are never scared, so feeling scared seems like failing. This phrase says that being scared and going anyway is what brave looks like.

Practice at home: Pick one small scary thing, like ordering at a counter or saying hello to a neighbor. Draw a ladder with three rungs and do only the first step together. About three minutes.

In the moment, say: "I'm scared, and I'm going. Want to come with me?"

2 · YOUR CHILD WAITS IN LINE FOR THE WATER FOUNTAIN OR A TURN ON THE SWINGS WHILE OTHERS GO FIRST.

"I'm the boss of my want."

Waiting is hard when a want feels huge. A phrase that puts your child in charge of the want, and a simple trick, gives the wait something to do.

Practice at home: Use a sand timer or a phone timer on a small want, like a snack or a turn. Let your child watch the time run out and pick a waiting trick: sing, count, or hold a toy. One or two minutes.

In the moment, say: "You can wait. What trick will you use while we wait?"

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3 · YOUR CHILD CANNOT ZIP A COAT OR WRITE THEIR NAME, AND THE CLASS IS ALREADY MOVING ON.

“Not yet.”

Adding the word "yet" turns "I can't" into "I'm still learning." It keeps the door open without pretending the task is easy.

Practice at home: Pick one thing your child cannot do yet, such as zipping a coat or a hard puzzle. Say "not yet" together, try one step for two minutes, then stop on a good note.

In the moment, say: “You can't do it yet. What could you try next?”

4 · ANOTHER CHILD GRABS YOUR CHILD'S MARKER, AND ANGER RISES FAST.

“Stop. Breathe. Choose.”

Anger at this age is big, fast, and physical. A short three-step routine is easier to remember when it has been practiced as a game while calm.

Practice at home: Make a paper circle and call it the pause button. When you press it, everyone freezes, takes one slow breath out like blowing a candle, then picks something silly to do. Play only when everyone is calm. Two to three minutes.

In the moment, say: “Let's play the pause button. Stop, breathe, choose. I'll go first.”

For grown-ups: Practice in calm moments, not in the middle of a hard one; a new skill is hard to find during a storm. Keep it short and playful. In the first weeks, tell the teacher which phrases you use at home, and ask if the class uses any of the same words.

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