Real-Life Conversation Scripts for Common Digital Media Battles

Most parents don't struggle because they don't care. They struggle because the stressful moments come fast. There's a conflict or pushback, and before they know it, BAM! They're in a conflict over screen use.

You are not failing. Parenting is hard.

When frustration takes over — yours or your child's — *the most important first step for you to get regulated.* A few slow breaths can shift you from reactive to thoughtful, and give you access to the part of your brain that is creative, grounded, and capable.

Kids need attunement AND structure.

When we get triggered, we can lose site of the important work of balancing attunement with structure. When this happens, we can flip into tighter control or resignation, keeping us locked in a power struggle dynamic with kids that only gets more complicated. This guide offers scripts for common screen battles that can help bring you back to balance.

How to use this guide

You don't have to say it perfectly. Tone matters more than wording. You can pause and come back later — repair is always possible. Even saying part of this imperfectly can shift the interaction. The important thing is: Attunement, then guardrails. If they're receptive, add a question to prompt them to think about greater responsibility.

1. Setting a Boundary

The "5 More Minutes!" Spiral

Your kid: Just five more minutes!

You: I get why you want more time — it makes sense. And right now, it's my job to help you build balance. It's time to get off screen. What's something you could do outside?

Ending with a question invites them to think creatively and engages their autonomy rather than resistance.

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The “La la la, Didn’t Hear You”

Your kid: *Ignores you after being told to shut off the computer*

You: I notice it's hard to stop — that tells me we need more structure here. Let's think about what that could look like together.

Like the “5 More Minutes” Spiral, this is more effective when the ideas come from kiddos.

The “All My Friends Have One”

Your kid: Can I please have a phone? I am the ONLY KID IN THE UNIVERSE without one.

You: I want you to have your own phone too. I'm not saying “no” forever. I'm saying “not yet.” Phones can cause a lot of problems, so let's focus on building the skills to ensure that’s not you. Then we can talk about when.

This is for those families where “Wait until 8th” is a challenge. Skills you can include here: finishing homework without reminders, managing chores, balancing screen time with in-person friendships.

The “I Can Handle It”

Your kid: I can handle playing Fortnite first. I'll do homework after.

You: I know it can be hard to say “no” to your friends. But homework comes first — and once you can consistently do that on your own, you'll have a lot more freedom because I'll know you can be responsible.

The “Gotcha!”

Your kid: Why can you doomscroll for hours, but when I want to play with my friends, it's bad?

You: You're right. Thank you for helping me notice that.

Kids are acutely sensitive to hypocrisy. When they point our our hypocritical screen habits, this is giving them practice noticing and naming unhealthy behavior, which is really great!! So it may feel bad/embarrassing in the moment, it’s actually helping them build a valuable skill.

> 💡 **Why this works**
>
> *You're holding the boundary without shame and without shutting down the relationship. You're positioning yourself as a* ***guide, not just an enforcer.***

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2. When They Push Back/Get Upset

Leading with empathy can go a long way to de-escalating a conflict.

The “Slingin’ Insults”

Your kid: I hate you! You are the worst mom/dad/human in the world!

You: Wow, OK. I can see this really matters to you. Let’s pause for a second — I can tell you’re really mad, and you’re saying things that make it difficult for me to hear you.

Here is where staying regulated is key. It’s easy to get triggered by comments like this, but when we model calm enforcement of boundaries, we can give the lessons about mindful speech when they’ll actually be able to hear it – later. (They won’t hear it when they’re mad.)

The “Tantrum”

You: Time for dinner. Can you please put away the iPad and come to the table?

Your kid: *launches into a full-blown screamfest*

This is a big test of your ability to stay regulated. Your child is overwhelmed; their thinking brain is offline. This is not a moment for reasoning — it’s a moment for co-regulation. Once they are calm, invite them to problem-solve ways to manage transitions. The best approaches are some combination of:

You: Whoa — that’s a lot of feeling. I’m right here.

You: We’re going to pause for a minute.

You: I’m not going to let you scream at me like that. We can talk when your body is calmer.

You: I’m here. *(Sometimes simplest is best)*

Yes, this is scary, and yes, device use tends to amplify these types of reactions. The muscle you’re helping them build is self-awareness to better manage their time and emotional responses. This is a long game. (Sometimes very long...)

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The “Hard Bargain”

Your kid: No fair! I refuse to eat anything but candy until you let me play Roblox after 9pm!

You: I’m not changing the decision right now, but I do want to understand what feels unfair.

Your kid: *Tries to pull you into a power struggle*

You: I’m not going to argue about this — but I am here to talk.

> 💡 **Why this works**
>
> You’re **de-escalating without giving in**. You’re showing them they can have feelings without those feelings driving the outcome.

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3. When Things Go Wrong (Repair)

If they broke a rule:

You: We need to talk about what happened — not to punish you, but to figure out what support you need next time.

If you overreacted:

You: I wish I had handled that differently, I got reactive. Can we reset and try again?

If trust is shaken:

You: Trust isn’t gone, but we need to rebuild it together.

If things feel stuck: You: We don’t have to solve this perfectly right now, but I don’t want us to stay disconnected.

> 💡 **Why this works:**
>
> Repair teaches more than punishment. It shows that **relationships can stretch and come back together** — which is one of the most important skills your child can learn.

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4. Talking About Readiness & Trust

Your kid: How come you don't trust me to have my own phone?

You: This isn't about trust, it's about readiness. Here are some thing you can do to practice...

Your kid: You will never think I'm ready.

You: You're *getting there*. My job is to help you build the skills to handle this well.

Your kid: I want more independence.

You: The more consistent you are in showing me you can handle this, the more freedom you'll have.

> 💡 **Why this works:**
>
> You shift from control → **development**. The focus becomes growth, not restriction.

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