Before You Respond

A practical pause between receiving a difficult message and sending your reply.

You do not have to answer every upsetting sentence. Respond to the child-related question, using facts and a clear next step.

1 Pause

If the message raises strong feelings, wait until you can respond deliberately. Do not delay urgent child-safety or time-sensitive needs.

2 Identify the actual issue

Look for the decision, request, schedule change, or information the child needs. Set aside personal criticism and speculation about motives.

3 Separate facts from assumptions

What is known? What needs clarification? Ask one focused question if a necessary detail is missing.

4 Choose a constructive next step

Confirm an agreement, offer a specific option, ask a practical question, or clearly say what is not yet resolved.

Example: from reactive to useful

Instead of: “You always change everything at the last minute!”
Try: “You’re asking to move Saturday pickup to 5:00 p.m. I can do that this week. Please confirm by Thursday at 6:00 p.m.”

Quick check before sending

Is it accurate? Child-focused? Free of insults and sarcasm? Does it identify a clear next step? Would it make sense if reviewed later?

Safety and boundaries

For threats, intimidation, coercive control, stalking, or fear of retaliation, a standard response script may not be safe. Use an appropriate safety plan and qualified support. A pause should not become avoidance of an urgent child need.

Educational resource only. Follow applicable court orders and parenting agreements. This is not legal advice or an individualized safety plan.

My response planner

Use this page before responding to a message that feels difficult. You can write a draft here without sending it immediately.

The child-related question or decision:

_____

_____

Facts I know (not assumptions):

_____

_____

Information I still need:

_____

_____

The next step I can propose:

_____

_____

My draft response:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Before sending, check:

☐ Focused on the child-related issue ☐ Respectful and factual ☐ Clear next step

☐ Appropriate timing ☐ Safe to send in my circumstances

If I am not responding now, my plan for a timely response:

_____

_____

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