

De-Escalation Scripts by Age Group

Toddlers (18 months–3 years)

Toddlers need:

- Very short phrases
- Concrete language
- Physical guidance
- Immediate co-regulation
- Repetition

They cannot process explanations during escalation. They need containment and calm.

Toddler Script

1. Name the feeling (simple)
“Mad.”
“You’re upset.”
2. State safety clearly (very short)
“Safe hands.”
“Feet on the floor.”
“No hitting.”
3. Show what to do
“Hands down.”
“Gentle touch.”
“Sit with me.”
4. Offer simple choice (1–2 words)
“Sit here or calm corner.”
“Help or hug?”
5. Stay physically close
Soft tone. Slow movements. Minimal words.

Toddler Example

Child hits during clean-up.

“Mad. Safe hands. Hands down. Sit with me or calm corner.”

Keep language simple, repetitive, and calm.

Preschoolers (3–5 years)

Preschoolers need:

- Slightly more language
- Emotional labeling
- Clear boundaries
- Regulated choices
- Later reflection

They can begin learning skills, but only after regulation.

Preschool Script

1. Name the feeling
“You’re really frustrated.”
2. State the boundary clearly
“We’re keeping everyone safe.”
“Hitting hurts.”
3. Give a direction
“Hands down.”
“Put the toy on the floor.”
4. Offer a choice
“You can sit with me or take a calm minute.”
“Do you want help or space?”
5. Reassure
“I’m here to help.”

Preschool Example

Child throws blocks during transition.

“You’re frustrated. We’re keeping everyone safe. Blocks stay on the floor. You can sit with me or take a calm minute.”

Key Differences

Toddlers:

- 1–3 word phrases
- Concrete language
- Physical guidance
- Immediate co-regulation
- No reasoning during escalation

Preschoolers:

- Short full sentences
- Emotion words
- Clear boundaries
- Regulated choices
- Brief reflection after calm

Shorter language supports regulation.

Teaching happens after the nervous system is calm.