

FIVE THINGS THEY SAY · WHAT THEY ACTUALLY MEAN

The Parent's Decoder.

What they're really telling you.

Five sentences your child says when something underneath isn't being said. **The brain story behind each one.** The emotion underneath. The road being built. And — gently — *what to say back.*



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COMPANION TO

The Daniel's Diaries platform
danielsdiaries.com.au
Where your child becomes the planner

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You've been translating for years.

If you're reading this, you've probably already worked out that what your child says and what they mean aren't the same thing. You've translated "*I hate school*" into "something happened today and I don't have the words." You've heard "*leave me alone*" and known not to leave them alone — not really, just to give them quiet. You've been doing this work without anyone teaching you how, and you've been doing it well.

This guide is not here to tell you anything you don't already half-know. It's here to **name what you're already doing**, give it some structure, and offer some language you can use back. The five sentences that follow are the ones that come up most often in the children we work with — and the ones most likely to be misread, by teachers, grandparents, partners, and sometimes even by us, on hard days.

*Each sentence is a **roadblock** in your child's town. The decoder shows you what's happening underneath — the brain story, the emotion, and the road being built — so you can meet them where they actually are.*

This guide is also for the parent — often a mother, often late-diagnosed herself — who recognises some of these sentences in her own internal voice. **The work of decoding your child is sometimes the work of decoding yourself.** Both can happen at once.

1**The brain story**

What's happening neurologically when this sentence comes out. Not pathology — physiology.

2**The emotion underneath**

The feeling the words are protecting. Often the opposite of what the words sound like.

3**The road being built**

What this moment is teaching the brain — for better or worse — about how the world responds to distress.

Daniel will guide you through. He's the golden retriever your child will meet on the platform — the one who knows every road in every town. For now, he's just walking you through the decoding work. *One sentence at a time.*



STATEMENT 1 · END OF SCHOOL DAY, IN THE CAR, AFTER A LONG SILENCE

“

I hate school.

— Often delivered flat, not loud

”

THE BRAIN STORY

The day was loud. The brain is quiet now.

After six hours of sustained social, sensory, and cognitive load, your child's nervous system has very little left. The prefrontal cortex — the part that handles nuance and explanation — is offline. **What's coming out is the simplest sentence the brain can produce that captures the whole day.**

THE EMOTION UNDERNEATH

Usually overwhelm. Sometimes loneliness. Rarely actual hate.

"Hate" is a placeholder word — the strongest one available when the real word ("I felt invisible at lunch", "the noise was too much", "I don't know how to do the maths") would take energy your child doesn't currently have. **The intensity is real; the target is shorthand.**

THE ROAD BEING BUILT

"Telling Mum is safe" — or "Mum will fix it before I'm ready."

If you respond with curiosity, the road being paved is **"hard things can be talked about."** If you respond with problem-solving or reassurance, the road becomes **"my distress is something to be managed away,"** and next time the sentence won't come out at all.

WHAT TO SAY BACK

Open the door. *Don't walk through it.* Let them lead.

TRY THIS

" Yeah. Big day, hey. Want to tell me a bit, or want some quiet first?"

OR THIS

" Tough one. We don't have to talk about it now. I'm here when you're ready. "

NOT THIS *"What happened? Did someone do something? Did you tell the teacher? Maybe we should talk to —"* Problem-solving in the door way closes the door before they've stepped through.

STATEMENT 2 · BEDROOM DOOR SLAMMING, MID-CONVERSATION, AFTER A LONG STRETCH OF TRYING

“

Leave me alone.

— Often louder than the moment requires

”

THE BRAIN STORY

The body is in fight-or-flight. The proximity is too much.

When the nervous system is dysregulated, even a loving voice three feet away registers as **another input the brain has to process**. Your child isn't rejecting you. They're communicating that their sensory and emotional bandwidth is full and any addition — even comfort — will tip them past the edge.

THE EMOTION UNDERNEATH

Almost always: "I want you near, but I can't bear it right now."

The painful paradox: the people we feel safest with are often the ones we push away hardest, because their love demands a response we don't have the capacity to give. **"Leave me alone" usually means "stay close — just not in this room, not asking anything."**

THE ROAD BEING BUILT

"My boundaries are heard" — or "I have to escalate to be respected."

If you honour the boundary calmly, the road being paved is **"my body's signals are taken seriously."** If you push past with "but I just want to help," the road becomes **"saying no isn't enough — I have to slam doors,"** and the next request will be louder, not gentler.

WHAT TO SAY BACK

Give the space. *Stay nearby*. Make sure they know you're there.

TRY THIS

"Okay. I'm in the kitchen if you need me. No rush."

OR THIS

"Got it. I'll come check in a bit. You don't have to talk when I do."

NOT THIS *"Don't speak to me like that."* True, the tone is sharp. But responding to tone in a moment of dysregulation teaches them their body's signals will be punished. Address the tone later, when their system is back online — not now.

STATEMENT 3 · MID-CONVERSATION, OFTEN AFTER YOU'VE TRIED TO RELATE BY SHARING YOUR OWN STORY

“

You don't get it.

— Sometimes a wall. Sometimes a test.

”

THE BRAIN STORY

Their brain has just left a different country than yours.

Adolescent brains in particular are running new social and identity software you literally cannot access. The neurological work of separating from parents is healthy and necessary. **"You don't get it" is partly true — and it has to be true** for them to develop the sense of inner privacy that adulthood requires.

THE EMOTION UNDERNEATH

A test: "If I let you all the way in, will you stay?"

Often it's loneliness wearing the costume of dismissal. They want you to keep trying — but only if you can do it without making the conversation about you, your generation, or what you would have done. **The "you don't get it" is checking whether your love can survive being told it's not enough.**

THE ROAD BEING BUILT

"My experience is mine" — or "I have to fight to be seen as separate."

If you accept the not-getting-it without taking it personally, the road being paved is **"my parent can hold me without needing to merge with me."** If you push back ("I do get it, I was your age once"), the road becomes **"I have to push harder to prove I'm a different person."**

WHAT TO SAY BACK

Let them be right. *Stay curious.* The conversation isn't over.

TRY THIS

"You're probably right. Help me get closer."

OR THIS

"Fair. I might be off. Tell me what I'm missing."

NOT THIS *"I do get it — I went through exactly the same thing."* Sometimes you did. But the moment requires **THEIR EXPERIENCE TO BE UNIQUELY THEIRS FIRST**. Your story can come in later, once they've felt fully heard. Often it doesn't need to come in at all.

STATEMENT 4 · HOMEWORK TABLE, BEFORE SPORT, LOOKING AT A HALF-FULL PAGE

“

I can't do this.

— Said quietly. Said often.

”

THE BRAIN STORY

The task has triggered a threat response. Logic is locked out.

When a child looks at a task and feels overwhelmed, the amygdala activates as if facing physical danger. Cortisol floods. The prefrontal cortex — where problem-solving lives — gets less oxygen and less blood flow. **"I can't do this" is literally true in the moment.** Their brain has decided the task is unsafe.

THE EMOTION UNDERNEATH

Shame, almost always. Sometimes fear of disappointing you.

"I can't do this" rarely means I lack the skill. It usually means **I'm afraid I'll try and fail and that will mean something about who I am.** The avoidance is protective: better to not try than to try and confirm a story they're already telling themselves about being broken or bad.

THE ROAD BEING BUILT

"Hard is okay" — or "I avoid hard things to stay safe."

If you stay calm and break the task into something small, the road is **"discomfort is survivable, support is available."** If you push ("just try", "you have to", "everyone does this"), the road becomes **"hard means unsafe, and unsafe means avoid,"** which generalises to every challenge for years.

WHAT TO SAY BACK

Believe them. *Then make it smaller.* Then start with you alongside.

TRY THIS

"Yeah, this looks like a lot. What if we just did the first line together?"

OR THIS

"Right now feels too big. Let's pause. We'll come back when your brain has more to give."

NOT THIS *"Yes you can. Just try. You're being dramatic."* Each of these tells the brain its threat response is wrong, which doesn't turn the threat response off — it just adds shame on top. The threat response is real; the threat itself is the thing to make smaller.

STATEMENT 5 · AFTER A SIBLING MOMENT, A "NO", A PERCEIVED INEQUITY — OFTEN DISPROPORTIONATE

“

It's not fair.

— Often the loudest sentence of the day

”

THE BRAIN STORY

The justice circuit is on fire – and it's not really about this.

Children's brains are wired to track fairness as a survival mechanism — **fairness historically meant access to food, safety, belonging.** When the fairness alarm goes off, it's drawing on a much bigger reservoir than the current moment. The cookie or the screen-time isn't the issue; the cumulative tally of feeling overlooked is.

THE EMOTION UNDERNEATH

"I am not as loved, as seen, as held as I need."

Almost always, "it's not fair" decoded becomes **"I'm worried I matter less."** Sometimes that worry has nothing to do with you — they got overlooked at school, a friend chose someone else, their teacher praised the kid next to them. The home is the safe place where the day's accumulated unfairness finally gets voiced.

THE ROAD BEING BUILT

"My distress is heard" – or "I have to be loud to count."

If you validate the feeling without litigating the facts, the road is **"my emotions don't have to be objectively correct to be taken seriously."** If you respond with logic ("but your sister actually got less last week"), the road becomes **"I have to escalate volume to be heard,"** and the next "not fair" is louder.

WHAT TO SAY BACK

Validate the feeling. *Skip the ledger.* The score isn't the point.

TRY THIS

"That feels really unfair right now. I get it."

OR THIS

"Yeah. It's a lot. You don't have to be okay with it yet."

NOT THIS *"Actually, last Tuesday you got the bigger slice, so really you're ahead."* Even if it's accurate, the ledger argument confirms **THEIR DISTRESS ISN'T BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY ON ITS OWN TERMS.** Right makes them louder. Loved makes them softer.

A NOTE FROM AIMEE · BEFORE YOU GO

If any of this **felt familiar** — there's more.

The five sentences in this guide are *roadblocks* in your child's town. There are seven major roads being built across childhood and adolescence, and the work of supporting your child is the work of helping them become the **town planner** of their own brain — not its passenger.

That's what **Daniel's Diaries** is. A platform built on the same brain-as-town framework, where your child works through cycles of skill-building across emotional regulation, resilience, behaviour, social mapping, and future planning — at their own pace, on their age band, with the metaphor doing the heavy lifting.

If you'd like to bring it home, here are two ways in.

MOST PARENTS START HERE

The full Daniel's Diaries platform

Your child's first cycle through the framework — guided by Lenny, Coco, Kip, Pepper, Eddie, Kai, and Billie (the seven character guides).

From \$19/month. Self-guided through to practitioner-supported tiers.

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The Traffic Light Check-In, the Bedtime Sleep Road, the 60-Second Brain Tour, and more — built by the same clinician, all designed to be tried in under 10 minutes.

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A SMALL REQUEST

If this guide was useful, the most powerful thing you can do is **share it with one other parent**. The decoding work is lonely. It gets less lonely when more parents have the language for it.

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