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FREE GUIDE FOR ESTRANGED PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS

The Targeted Parent's Communication Script Pack

*Word-for-word scripts for parents navigating estrangement,
alienation, and no-contact from an adult child.*

The First Reach-Out	When It Turns Cruel	Boundary, Open Door
Escaping the JADE Trap	Hard Dates & Holidays	When They Reach Out

A research-based, faith-informed toolkit

by

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A FOREWORD

A Letter Before You Begin

Dear friend,

If you are reading this, you are likely holding more pain than the people around you understand. You love a child who has gone silent, or cruel, or distant — and the love hasn't stopped, even when the contact has.

I want to say something to you before you read another word: what you are carrying is real. Ambiguous loss — grieving someone who is still alive — is one of the hardest forms of grief there is. The fact that you are still trying, still searching for the right words, still here, says everything about the kind of parent you are.

This pack is not magic. No script can make another adult choose reconnection. What scripts *can* do is keep you from making the situation worse in moments when your nervous system is screaming at you to chase, defend, justify, or beg. They give your hands something to do besides type the message you'll regret by morning.

Read this pack once all the way through. Then come back to whichever section matches the moment you're in. Print it. Highlight it. Adapt the words to sound like you. These are starting points, not commandments.

A few ground rules before we begin:

1. Send less than you want to send. Almost always, a shorter message lands better than a longer one. When in doubt, cut it in half.
2. Wait 24 hours before sending anything written in tears. Save it as a draft. Read it the next morning. You will thank yourself.
3. You are allowed to not respond. Silence is a complete sentence. Not every message your child or someone in their orbit sends requires a reply.
4. This is not a substitute for professional support. If you are in crisis or considering self-harm, call or text 988 (US Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) right now. You deserve someone in the room with you.

With you in this,

Cathy Jo

ORIENTATION

How to Use This Pack

Each section follows the same structure:

THE SITUATION	<i>when to use these scripts</i>
THE PRINCIPLE	<i>the one thing to remember before you send anything</i>
THE SCRIPTS	<i>word-for-word messages you can adapt</i>
WHAT NOT TO SEND	<i>common traps to avoid</i>

Adapt every script to your own voice. If a word feels stiff coming out of your mouth, change it. The goal is regulated, warm, non-defensive communication — not perfect communication.

SECTION 01

The First Reach-Out

When you've been no-contact for weeks, months, or years

THE SITUATION

You haven't heard from your adult child in a long time. The silence has become its own presence in your home. You want to reach out, but every draft feels wrong — too much, too little, too sorry, not sorry enough.

THE PRINCIPLE

The first reach-out is not the place to resolve anything. Its only job is to open a small door and let your child decide whether to walk through it. Keep it short. Make no demands. Ask no questions that require an answer. Express no expectations.

A first reach-out that asks nothing is far more likely to be received than one that asks for everything.

THE SCRIPTS

SCRIPT 1A · The Soft Opening (after long silence)

Hi [Name],

I've been thinking about you. I'm not writing to ask anything of you — I just wanted you to know that I love you, and that the door is always open whenever you're ready, in whatever way feels right to you.

No pressure to reply.

Love,

[Mom / Dad / your name]

SCRIPT 1B · The Acknowledgment Opening (when something happened that needs naming)

[Name],

I've had a lot of time to think, and I want you to know I've heard what you said. I'm working on understanding it, and on becoming someone you might want to know again someday.

I'm not writing to defend myself or to ask anything of you. I just wanted you to know I love you, and that I'm here whenever — and if ever — you want to talk.

Love,
[your name]

SCRIPT 1C · The Milestone Opening (birthdays, holidays, anniversaries)

Hi [Name],

Thinking of you on your birthday. I hope this year brings you peace and good things.

No need to reply. Just wanted you to know you are loved.

[your name]

SCRIPT 1D · The Grandparent Opening (when grandchildren are involved)

Hi [Name],

I want to respect the space you've asked for. I'm not writing to push or to ask for time with [grandchild's name] — I just want you to know that I love them, I love you, and I'm here whenever you decide what's right for your family.

Wishing you well.

[your name]

WHAT NOT TO SEND IN A FIRST REACH-OUT

- "I don't understand why you're doing this to me."
- "Your father / mother / sibling is heartbroken."
- "Please just call me. I can't keep living like this."
- Long timelines of "what really happened."
- Photos of yourself, the family home, the dog, or old memories — these often feel like emotional pressure, not connection.
- Anything sent after 9 p.m. or before 8 a.m. Late-night and early-morning messages read as desperate, even when they aren't.

SECTION 02

When Communication Turns Cruel

What to say when your adult child lashes out, name-calls, or rewrites the past

THE SITUATION

Contact has resumed — sometimes in the form of a furious text, a cruel voicemail, or a message accusing you of things you don't recognize. Your chest is tight. Your hands are shaking. Every part of you wants to defend, explain, or fight back.

THE PRINCIPLE

Cruelty is often a test. Not a conscious one — but a nervous-system test. Your child (or whoever has shaped their view) is watching to see whether you will react the way they expect, which would confirm the story that's been built about you. The single most powerful thing you can do is not perform the role you've been cast in.

You do not have to absorb cruelty. You also do not have to return it. There is a third option: stay regulated, stay warm, stay brief, and protect yourself.

THE SCRIPTS

SCRIPT 2A · The Calm Acknowledgment (when accused of something)

I hear that you're really hurting, and I take that seriously. I'm not going to argue the details with you over text — that's not fair to either of us. I love you, and I'm willing to listen whenever you want to talk in a way that feels safe for both of us.

SCRIPT 2B · The Non-Defensive Pause (when name-called or insulted)

I love you, and I'm not going to respond to this the way it's written. When you're ready to talk to me without [name-calling / threats / insults], I'm here.

SCRIPT 2C · The Memory-Rewrite Response (when the past is being reframed)

I know we remember some things very differently, and I'm not going to try to convince you of my version over a text. What I can tell you is that I love you, I've made mistakes, and I'm willing to do the real work of understanding yours when you want to have that conversation.

SCRIPT 2D · The Hard Stop (when cruelty crosses into abuse)

I love you, and I'm not able to be spoken to this way. I'm going to step away from my phone for the rest of the day. I'll be here when you want to talk respectfully.

Then put the phone down. Do not check it. Do not respond to follow-up messages. The boundary is only real if you keep it.

WHAT NOT TO SEND WHEN COMMUNICATION TURNS CRUEL

- "After everything I've done for you..."
- "You have no idea what you're talking about."
- "Your [therapist / partner / sibling] is poisoning you against me."
- Long point-by-point rebuttals.
- Screenshots, receipts, or "proof."
- Any message that includes the words *always* or *never*.

A note on regulation: if you cannot send a calm message, send no message. Type the rage-reply into a notes app, save it, close your phone, and go for a walk. Come back in 24 hours.

SECTION 03

The Boundary Without the Door-Slam

How to say "not like this" without saying "never again"

THE SITUATION

You need to protect yourself — from contact that hurts you, from being used as an emotional outlet, from financial demands, from being asked to choose sides, from late-night calls that derail your life. But you also don't want to make the estrangement permanent.

THE PRINCIPLE

A boundary is a statement about you, not a verdict on them. The healthiest boundaries name what you will or won't do, not what they must or must not do. Boundaries also have a clear "open door" inside them. The format that works:

I love you. Here's what I can do. Here's what I can't do right now. The door stays open.

THE SCRIPTS

SCRIPT 3A · The Communication Channel Boundary

I love you and I want to stay in contact with you. What I'm not able to do is have hard conversations over text — they get away from both of us. If there's something important you want to talk about, I'd love to do it on a phone call or in person when you're ready. For day-to-day things, text is great.

SCRIPT 3B · The Topic Boundary

I love you, and I want our relationship to keep growing. I'm not going to talk about [your father / your sister / what happened in 2019] over text or in passing — those conversations deserve more care than that. When you want to sit down and have that talk fully, I'm here for it.

SCRIPT 3C · The Frequency Boundary (when contact is overwhelming or one-sided)

I love hearing from you. I'm finding I can't respond as quickly as you sometimes need me to, and I don't want you to feel ignored. If I haven't replied within a day, please know it isn't avoidance — I just need a little more time to give you a real answer.

SCRIPT 3D · The Financial Boundary

I love you, and I'm not in a position to [send money / co-sign / cover that] right now. I know that's not the answer you were hoping for. I'm still your [parent], and I'm still here for the parts of this I can help with.

SCRIPT 3E · The "I Need a Pause" Boundary (when YOU need to step back)

I love you. I need a few days to think and take care of myself before we talk again. I'm not disappearing, and I'm not angry — I just want to come back to this conversation as my best self. I'll reach out by [specific day].

Then actually reach out by that day. Keeping your own word is part of repair.

WHAT NOT TO SEND AS A BOUNDARY

- "If you ever speak to me like that again, you will never see me."
- "I'm done. Don't contact me until you're ready to apologize."
- Boundaries that read as ultimatums.
- Boundaries you don't actually intend to keep — your child will learn that the line moves, and the next test will be harder.

SECTION 04

Escaping the JADE Trap

Why Justifying, Arguing, Defending, and Explaining make estrangement worse — and what to do instead

THE SITUATION

You've been accused. Misrepresented. Told a version of the past that erases what really happened. Every cell in your body wants to *make them understand*. If you could just lay out the timeline, share the texts, prove what really happened — surely they'd see.

THE PRINCIPLE

They won't. Not because they're stupid or evil, but because nervous systems in alienation or estrangement are not in a state to receive evidence. Defending yourself reads as attacking them. Explaining reads as gaslighting. Justifying reads as not taking responsibility. Arguing reads as proof of the story they've been told.

JADE is the trap. The way out is acknowledgment without agreement, and warmth without surrender.

You can validate your child's feelings without conceding to a version of events you don't believe is true. Both things can live in one sentence.

THE JADE REPLACEMENTS

Instead of (JADE)

Try (Acknowledge + Open Door)

"That's not what happened."

"I know we remember it very differently. I'd like to understand your experience of it."

"I never said that."

"I'm sorry that's what landed for you. That wasn't what I meant — and I want to do better."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"There's clearly more here than I've understood. I want to hear it when you're ready."

"After everything I sacrificed for you..."

"I love you. I'm not asking for credit. I'm asking for a chance to know you now."

"Your therapist / partner is turning you against me."

"I trust you to figure out what's true for you. I'm here whenever you want to talk to me directly."

SCRIPT 4A · The Universal JADE Replacement

I hear you. I'm taking this seriously, and I don't want to defend myself in a way that makes you feel unheard. I love you, and I want to keep listening.

When you don't know what else to say, the script above works in almost any accusatory exchange.

SCRIPT 4B · The "I Was Wrong" Acknowledgment (when you genuinely were)

You're right. I did [specific thing], and I'm sorry. I'm not going to make excuses for it. I want to do better, and I'm working on it.

A clean apology has three parts: name the thing, take responsibility, state the change. No "but." No "I was just." No "you have to understand."

SCRIPT 4C · The Partial Acknowledgment (when some of it is true and some isn't)

Some of what you said is fair, and I'm sitting with it. Some of it I see differently, and I don't think now is the time to sort that out. What I can tell you is that I love you, and I'm not going to argue with you about who's right.

WHAT NOT TO SEND INSIDE THE JADE TRAP

- Long timelines, screenshots, or "evidence."
- Messages that begin with "Actually..."
- Anything that includes the phrase "the truth is."
- Letters from other family members vouching for you.
- Any version of "you'll regret this someday."

SECTION 05

Birthdays, Holidays & Grandchildren

Three short messages for the dates that hurt the most

THE SITUATION

The calendar keeps moving. Their birthday. Mother's Day. Father's Day. Christmas. The first day of school. The day the grandchild turns the age your own child was when everything changed. Each date is a small grief.

THE PRINCIPLE

On hard dates, the goal is presence without pressure. A short, warm acknowledgment — sent and then released. No follow-up if there's no reply. No second message "in case the first didn't go through." One message, sent in love, and then you go live the rest of your day.

If you don't hear back, that does not mean it didn't matter. Many estranged adult children read these messages and save them, even when they cannot answer.

THE SCRIPTS

SCRIPT 5A · Their Birthday

Hi [Name],

Happy birthday. I hope this year is gentle to you and brings good things your way. Thinking of you today, like I do every [date].

No need to reply.

Love,
[your name]

SCRIPT 5B · A Holiday

[Name],

Just thinking of you this [Christmas / Easter / Thanksgiving]. I hope the day is a good one. You are loved.

[your name]

SCRIPT 5C · A Grandchild's Milestone

Hi [Name],

I saw it's [grandchild's name]'s [first day of school / birthday / graduation]. I hope it's a wonderful day for them and for you. I'm thinking of all of you with so much love.

No need to respond. Just wanted you to know.

[your name]

SCRIPT 5D · Mother's Day or Father's Day (when YOU are the one being unacknowledged)

This one isn't sent — it's written. On the days the world celebrates parents and your child does not call, write yourself a letter. Name what you've given. Name what you've lost. Name what you still hope for. Then put it away.

You are still a parent. Their silence does not unmake that.

WHAT NOT TO SEND ON HARD DATES

- "I haven't heard from you on my birthday in three years."
- "Even just a text would have meant the world."
- Two messages in a row when the first goes unanswered.
- Anything sent after a glass of wine.
- Group texts that include them and other family members — these read as performance.

SECTION 06

When They Finally Reach Out

The first ten sentences matter more than any others

THE SITUATION

After weeks, months, or years — they reached out. A text. A call. An email. A holiday card with a return address. Your hands are shaking. Your chest is full of every word you've held in for the entire silence.

THE PRINCIPLE

This is the most fragile moment in the entire estrangement, and almost everything depends on what you do in the first 48 hours. Your child has taken a small risk. The single goal of your response is to make that risk feel safe — not to resolve the past, not to pour out everything you've felt, not to ask where they've been. Match their energy. Mirror their length. Leave space.

If they sent a sentence, send a sentence. If they sent a paragraph, send a short paragraph. If they called, keep the call short and let them lead.

There will be time for the bigger conversations. This is not that time.

THE SCRIPTS

SCRIPT 6A · They Sent a Short Text ("Hey" / "Thinking of you")

Hi [Name]. So good to hear from you. Hope you're well. xo

That's it. That's the whole message. Resist every urge to add more. Wait for them to send the next thing.

SCRIPT 6B · They Asked How You Are

I'm doing okay. Better, hearing from you. How are you?

Short, warm, returns the question, no guilt, no history.

SCRIPT 6C · They Apologized

Thank you for saying that. It means more than you know. I love you, and I'm so glad you reached out. Whenever you want to talk more, I'm here.

Do not pile on with your own apologies, your own list, or "I forgive you BUT..." Receive it. Thank them. Leave the door wide.

SCRIPT 6D · They Want to Meet

Yes. I'd love that. You pick the time and place — whatever works for you, works for me.

Let them lead the logistics. This signals that you are not going to overwhelm them, and it returns control to the person who needs it most right now.

SCRIPT 6E · The First In-Person Meeting

When you sit down together for the first time, here are the only rules:

- 01 Hug only if they reach first. Do not crush them.
- 02 No tears in the first ten minutes if you can help it. They will read tears as pressure, even when they are pure love.
- 03 Ask easy questions. *How's your work? How's the apartment? Tell me about [their dog / hobby / something neutral].*
- 04 Do not bring up the estrangement unless they bring it up first.
- 05 Keep the visit short. End it five minutes before either of you wants it to end. Leave them wanting the next visit.
- 06 Say one thing as you leave: *"It was so good to see you. I love you."* Then go.

WHAT NOT TO SEND WHEN THEY FINALLY REACH OUT

- "I've been waiting two years to hear from you."
- "Your father / mother is going to be so happy. Should I tell them?"
- "Are you ready to talk about what happened?"
- A long message catching them up on everything you've felt.
- Photos, scrapbooks, or "I kept all your old..."
- Any version of "I knew you'd come around."

BONUS RESOURCE

The "Before You Hit Send" Checklist

Seven questions to run every message through before your finger hits the button

Print this. Tape it to the inside of a cabinet. Save it as a screenshot on your phone's lock screen. Use it every single time.

1. Have I waited at least one hour since I wrote this?

If no — wait. Save it as a draft. The message will still be there in an hour. Almost no message becomes worse with time. Many become much better.

2. Would I be okay if this exact message were read aloud in court, screenshotted, or shown to my child's therapist?

If no — rewrite. Assume every message you send will be seen by people you didn't send it to. Write accordingly.

3. Is this message under 4 sentences?

If no — cut it. Long messages almost always read as pressure, even when they are written in love. The shorter the message, the more likely it is to be received.

4. Am I asking for anything in this message — a reply, a visit, a feeling, a change?

If yes — ask whether the request is necessary right now. Most reach-outs land better when they ask for nothing at all.

5. Have I used the words always, never, every time, or you-followed-by-an-accusation?

If yes — rewrite. These words almost always escalate. Replace with "sometimes," "lately," or "I've noticed."

6. Am I sending this between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m.?

If yes — save it. Late-night and early-morning messages read as desperate, even when they aren't. Send it tomorrow between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

7. If my child read this message and never responded, would I still be glad I sent it?

If no — don't send it. Send only the messages you can release. Anything sent with a hidden expectation of a reply will eat you alive while you wait.



ONE LAST QUESTION

If you have answered all seven and you're still unsure: send it to a trusted friend first. Not a family member with a stake in the outcome. A friend. A therapist. A support group member. Ask them one question: *"Would you send this?"*

If they hesitate — don't.

A CLOSING WORD

Before You Close This Pack

You are not failing because this is hard. This *is* hard. It is one of the hardest things a parent can carry, and the fact that you are trying to carry it well — that you downloaded this pack, that you are reading word-for-word scripts at whatever hour you are reading this — says everything about who you are.

Scripts are tools. They are not your love. Your love is the engine; these are just the steering wheel for moments when your hands are too shaky to drive.

Whatever happens next, please remember:

- ◆ You are still a parent.
- ◆ Your love is not a mistake.
- ◆ Many estrangements do soften. Many adult children do come back. The research is on the side of hope.
- ◆ You are not alone in this.

I'll see you on the channel.

— *Cathy Jo*

KEEP GOING — RESOURCES

- ◆ Hart to Heart Podcast
Research-based, faith-informed episodes for estranged parents and grandparents. New episodes weekly at cathyjohart.com and on YouTube @cathyjohart.
- ◆ Start with the playlist
Estranged Parents: Help When Your Adult Child Cuts You Off — a research-based, watch-in-order series.
- ◆ Stay in touch
Subscribe at cathyjohart.com for new scripts, episodes, and resources delivered to your inbox.
- ◆ Crisis support
If you are in crisis or considering self-harm, call or text 988 (US Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or your local emergency number. You are not alone.

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