

OXYTOCIN JOY OF LEARNING · THE ECHO HOUSE

The first thirty seconds

A short guide for parents and carers of young people aged 11 to 18: what to do in the moment your child tells you something hard.

Free from Oxytocin-Learning Ltd. Ten minutes to read. Keep it on the fridge.

Why the first thirty seconds

One evening your child says something that stops you. A joke in the group chat that was not a joke. Something a teacher said. Being left out. A word about their skin, their hair, their name.

What you do in the first thirty seconds tells them whether it was safe to say. It decides whether they tell you the next thing, and the thing after that.

Young people already notice more than adults think. They do not usually need us to explain the world to them. They need to know that when they bring it home, it lands somewhere steady.

> **You do not need the right answer.** In the first thirty seconds nobody can fix anything. Your only job is to show that you heard, and that you are not going anywhere.



Three things to do

1. **Stop.**
   Put the phone down, turn the hob off, look up. Stopping says "this matters" before you have said a word.

2. **Say back what you heard.**
   "That sounds like it really got to you." "So he said that in front of everyone." Saying it back shows you were listening, and lets them correct you.

3. **Ask one open question, then wait.**
   "What happened next?" or "What do you want from me right now?" Then leave the silence. The most important part is often what comes after the pause.

Three things to hold back, for now

- **The lecture.** Advice can wait until they ask for it.
- **The rush to fix it.** Ringing the school tonight can take the story out of their hands. Decide together, later.
- **The doubt.** "Are you sure that is what they meant?" teaches a young person not to bring the next thing home.

> In The Echo House we call this using a watering can, not pruning shears: you help their thinking grow, instead of cutting it back.

Words that help

Keep a few of these ready. You will not need all of them.

"Thank you for telling me."

"I believe you."

"That should not have happened to you."

"Do you want me to just listen, or to help?"

"You do not have to decide anything tonight."

"Can we come back to this after dinner?"

When it is about race

If your child names race, name it too. Avoid "I am sure they did not mean it": it may be true, and it still tells your child their reading of the moment does not count. You can say, "That sounds like it was about your colour. How did it feel?" It is fine not to have answers. Being honest that it is hard is an answer in itself.

After the thirty seconds

Come back to it

Later that evening, or the next day: "I have been thinking about what you told me. How are you doing with it?" Coming back shows it mattered to you after the moment passed.

Write it down, together

If the school may need to know, write down what happened while it is fresh: the date, where, who was there, what was said, and what your child did afterwards. Write it so that a stranger could read it a year from now and know what happened.

Let them lead on what happens next

Ask what they would like to happen. Some young people want you to act; some want only to be heard. Where you do need to act to keep them safe, tell them what you are doing and why.

If they are not safe

Childline	0800 1111, free and confidential for young people, any time. childline.org.uk
Shout	Text SHOUT to 85258, free, any time.
NSPCC helpline for adults	0808 800 5000, if you are worried about a child.
Emergency	999, if someone is in immediate danger.

The Echo House

Twelve rooms over twelve weeks for young people aged 11 to 18: the group chat, the corridor, the feed, music, food and making things, with the truth told kindly.

While your child moves through the rooms, you have six parents' circles of your own, matched to what they are meeting. This guide comes from the second of them: the first thirty seconds.

> **Reserve your family's place at £79**, the founding price until 31 December 2026. From 1 January 2027 the standard price of £149 applies. No payment is taken when you reserve.
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> **oxytocin-learning.com/joy-of-learning**

Oxytocin Joy of Learning is safe by design for under-18s: a young person needs no account and no sign-in, what they write stays on their own device, no chatbot talks to them, and nothing they do is used to profile them.

Oxytocin-Learning Ltd, co-founded by Dr Jacqui Dyer MBE and Edward Neequaye MSc. This guide offers general support for parents and carers; it is not professional or clinical advice.