

I DON'T KNOW

When "I don't know" is actually a paragraph

BEHAVIOR

It may look disrespectful or dismissive. They may get quiet, tearful or engage in an emotional outburst.



REASONS

- A Lack of Coping Tools: They don't have the practiced skills required to navigate the next step.
- The Choice: Fear of choosing wrong or having too many options.
- The Vocabulary: Limited emotional language to describe the struggle.
- Not knowing the first step.
- Perfectionism: Fear of doing it imperfectly.
- Self-protection: Avoiding conflict, avoiding disappointment, or avoiding being told they're doing it wrong.

STRATEGIES

ASK YOURSELF:

- Do they have tools for this?
- Do they know what's on the menu?
- What might they need?
- How can I give them language?



USE THESE PROMPTS

- "Is it that you don't know what to choose or how to decide?"
- "Do you need ideas or time?"
- "Want to talk through it?"
- "Are you worried about my reaction?"
- "Are you feeling overwhelmed?"
- "Do you need anything from me?"
- "Do you want help starting or help finishing?"
- "Help me understand what is going on."

HELP THEM REPLACE "I DON'T KNOW" WITH:

- "I need options."
- "I don't know how to start."
- "I'm overwhelmed."
- "I'm afraid of being wrong."
- "I don't have a strategy yet."
- "I'm worried you will be disappointed."

SUPPORT GROWTH

Because kids who can't move past "I don't know" often:

- Avoid challenges.
- Shut down under pressure.
- Rely heavily on adults.
- Doubt their own abilities.
- Have limited emotional vocabulary
- Disengage
- Have negative self-talk