

The Handoff Script

A real handoff at day's end, not a status dump

A good shift handoff in any operation isn't "here's everything that happened," it's a tight brief: what's live, what needs eyes, what can wait. Bad handoffs dump the whole day on the next person and call it thorough. The end of your workday is a handoff too, whether to a partner, a co-parent, or a sitter, and most of us do it badly: either total silence ("hey, how was your day") or an overwhelming download that nobody can actually act on. This script fixes that in five minutes.

What you need: the person you're handing off to, in the room or on the phone, five minutes before the transition happens.

The steps

1. **State the headline first.** (30 seconds) One sentence on how the day actually went, not a play by play. "Rough morning, smooth afternoon" is enough.
2. **Flag what's live.** (1 minute) Anything currently in motion: a nap that might end soon, a mood that's been simmering, a promise you made ("I told her we'd do X after dinner").
3. **Flag what needs eyes.** (1 minute) Not urgent, but worth watching. A cough that started today, a friend drama that hasn't resolved, screen time that's already used up.
4. **Say what can wait.** (30 seconds) Explicitly naming this stops the other person from re-litigating something that's already handled.
5. **Ask one direct question.** (1 minute) "What do you need from me tonight?" Actually listen to the answer instead of already planning your response.
6. **Hand off fully.** (1 minute) Once it's said, let it go. Re-explaining the same thing three more times isn't a handoff, it's anxiety.

Tonight's handoff

Headline

What's live right now

What needs eyes (not urgent)

What can wait

What I need from you tonight

When it goes sideways

The handoff turns into a rehash of who had it harder today. Table it. Say “let’s compare notes after bedtime” and stick to the script. Competing over whose day was worse helps nobody at 5:45 PM.

One of you isn’t home to hand off in person. Voice memo or three-line text works fine. The structure matters more than the medium.

You hand off and then can’t let go, checking in every ten minutes. That defeats the whole point. If you trusted the handoff enough to give it, trust it enough to walk away.

A good handoff means the next person isn’t guessing. That’s the whole gift you’re giving each other.