

The Before She Leaves Guide

10 THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR PARENTS OF GIRLS HEADING AWAY

A short, practical guide for parents navigating the weeks before their daughter leaves home, for boarding school, camp, university, or her next chapter.

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A note before you begin

My father taught me many things over the years, but the most important wasn't a fact, it was a phrase.

Whenever I was stuck, or scared, or trying to force myself into someone I wasn't, he never told me what to do. Instead, he'd ask: "Have you considered..." Because he believed real lessons aren't handed down, they're uncovered.

So instead of answers, he gave me questions, and let me find my own way there.

Some of those questions took years to make sense. I'd hear the same one at sixteen and again at twenty-six, and it landed completely differently each time, because I was finally ready to hear it.

I've since spent over twenty years raising four stepdaughters through their own teenage years. Four very different girls, each needing something different from me, at different times.

And what I learned raising them was exactly what my father had already shown me: you can't hand a teenager the answer and expect it to stick. The moment you do, it becomes your conclusion, not hers, something to push back against rather than something to grow into.



But a good question, asked at the right moment, has a way of doing the work an answer never could. It respects that she's capable of getting there herself.

That's really what this guide is. Not a set of instructions for the road ahead, a set of better questions, for both of you, to use along the way.

Happy reading,

Dr Katherine Iscoe



01

ASK, DON'T INSTRUCT

She's leaving in a week, and you're already mentally drafting the list: remember to eat breakfast, don't leave your laundry till Sunday night, text me when you land. It's oh-so tempting to hand over a list of instructions like this. It feels good because it makes us feel useful, like we've done our job, like we've covered every base. But every instruction we hand over is a decision she didn't get to practice making herself.

The single biggest shift you can make is moving from telling her what to do, to asking her what she's thinking of doing. It sounds small, but it changes everything about how prepared she feels to handle things without you in the room.

It's kind of like: Handing over the steering wheel and letting them navigate their own path, instead of driving for them.

Try this:

Next time a decision comes up, whether big or small, ask "what are you thinking of doing?" before you offer your own answer. Let her get there first.

02

AGREE ON WHEN YOU'LL TALK, NOT JUST THAT YOU WILL

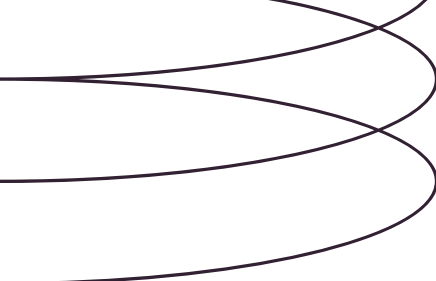
It's been six hours since her last text and your mind's already halfway to worst-case scenarios, so you send "just checking in!" for the second time today. Reaching out every moment you're worried (which will happen often, especially at the start) feels good in the moment; it shuts down our own unease fast and feels like the "right thing to do." But it also means she gets used to being checked on constantly, rather than learning to trust that she'll be okay on her own, while also helping you build your own tolerance for not knowing how she's doing every minute of the day.

A set day and time to catch up gives her something steady to look forward to, without feeling watched in between. To be clear, this doesn't mean you can never message her outside that window! The point is that the scheduled check-in becomes the thing you can both rely on, so contact isn't only happening when one of you is anxious or something's gone wrong.

It's kind of like: Training wheels on a schedule, not always on.

Try this:

Pick one regular slot together (Sunday evening, for example) as your standing catch-up. Let other contact be the exception, not the default.



03

GIVE HER PROBLEMS A HEAD START

When she calls with a problem, a friendship issue, a mix-up, something unfair, stepping in immediately feels good because the problem disappears fast, and it feels like the biggest bundle of love you can give her.

But it also tells her: 'you couldn't have handled that without me'. Try giving her a little space to attempt it herself first. That's often where real confidence gets built — not in the fixing, but in the attempt.

It's kind of like: Letting her be the first responder to her own life.

Try this:

Before stepping in, ask: "what have you tried so far, or what were you thinking of trying?" Let that be the first question, every time.

04

PRACTICE THE "GROWN-UP" TASKS TOGETHER

She mentions, almost in passing, that she's never actually booked a doctor's appointment herself, or queried a wrong charge, or worked out what to do when a delivery goes to the wrong address. These aren't skills most girls are taught directly — they're expected to just pick them up somewhere along the way.

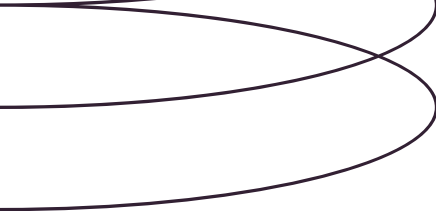
Doing it for her is faster and feels kinder in the moment. But it means the first time she does it alone is exactly when it matters most, with no one to ask. Doing a few of these together beforehand means she's not learning them for the first time solo, under pressure.

It's kind of like: A dress rehearsal, not a rescue.

Try this:

Pick two or three small real-life tasks to do side-by-side before she leaves, not for her, with her.



05

HAVE A PHRASE FOR "SLIPPING BACK INTO FIXING IT"

Even with the best intentions, parents can unintentionally slip back into managing rather than advising, especially in the early weeks after she's left. It's an easy slip to make! You're not trying to control her, you're just trying to help, right? And "helping" has old muscle memory behind it. The trouble is how it lands on her end.

And if she calls it out directly, "you're doing the thing again", it can feel to you like criticism, even when she doesn't mean it that way, and it can quickly turn into a defensive back-and-forth that teaches neither of you anything.

Agree on a light, shared phrase she can use instead, so flagging it doesn't feel like an accusation, just a nudge between two people on the same team, not a criticism landing out of nowhere.

It's kind of like: slowly releasing a pressure valve, rather than waiting for it to explode.

Try this:

Agree on a simple phrase together now, something as simple as "who's driving?" does the same job as calling it out directly, without it turning into a battle.

06

FOR HARD PHONE CALLS, ASK 2 QUESTIONS, NOT 10

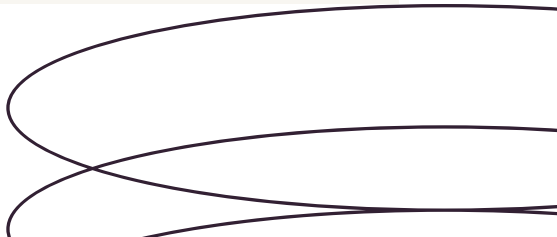
When she calls upset, jumping straight into solving it feels like being a good, responsive parent. But it skips right past the actual question: whether she wanted a solution at all, or just wanted to be heard. Answering the wrong one leaves her feeling more alone, not less.

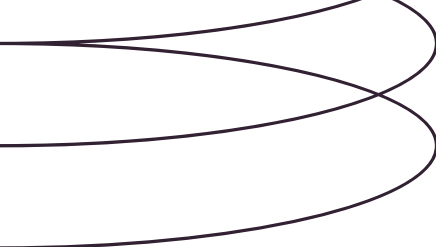
Two simple questions do more good than a dozen suggestions: what does she need right now, and what does she think her next step is?

It's kind of like: Handing someone a wrench when what they wanted was a hug.

Try this:

Ask "do you want ideas, or just to vent?" before offering anything. Let her answer decide what happens next.





07

AGREE ON MONEY BEFORE IT BECOMES A FIGHT

Picture this: she texts asking for extra cash "just this once," and you send it without thinking twice, because saying yes is easier than the conversation that comes with saying no. It feels generous in the moment, and it costs you nothing to type. But do that enough times without ever naming the plan out loud, and money becomes the place where every unresolved tension goes to live, the argument that used to be about curfew is now about spending, and neither of you can quite say why it feels so loaded.

Deciding upfront what's covered, what she manages herself, and what actually warrants a message to you turns money from a minefield into a plan you both already agreed to.

It's kind of like: Giving the keys to the car without ever agreeing on the speed limit.

Try this:

Sit down before she leaves and write down, together, exactly what she's responsible for financially and what isn't hers to worry about.

08

LET YOURSELF GRIEVE, ON PAPER

It's 11pm, she hasn't texted back since this morning, and you find yourself typing "just checking you're okay 🧡" for the third time today. Not because anything's actually wrong, but because... you miss her. Sending it feels like relief, instant and real. But what she receives is your worry landing on her, right when she's meant to be finding her own footing, not managing yours.

The sadness, the missing her, the strange quiet in the house, there's no doubt that's real, and painful, and it deserves somewhere to go. It just doesn't have to be her phone.

It's kind of like: Handing her your homesickness to carry, when she's still figuring out how to carry her own.

Try this:

Write the text exactly as you would've sent it in your notes app. Don't hold back, let it all come out. Save it and set it aside for an hour, then re-read it. Send her something only if it still feels like it's actually for her, not for you.



HELP HER NAME WHO ELSE IS IN HER CORNER

It's the middle of the night where you are, or you're mid-flight, or simply asleep, and that's exactly the moment something goes wrong for her. Being the one she always calls feels good, like proof of how close you are.

But if you're the only name on that list, "you're unreachable" equates to "I'm alone" for her. Before she leaves, help her name two or three real people in her new world who can be her optional first line of support: a house parent, a teacher, a friend's family, a mentor. Not instead of you. Just so you're not the only safe space she has.

It's kind of like: Being her only umbrella in a place where it rains a lot.

Try this:

Have her actually message or meet each one before she leaves, even briefly, so they're a real connection and not just a name on a list. A person she's already spoken to once is far easier to reach out to than a stranger she's been told to call.

PLAN THE GOODBYE, DON'T JUST LET IT HAPPEN

The car's packed, the last bag's in the trunk, and suddenly it's just the two of you standing in a car park or a departure hall, not quite sure what to say. Winging it feels more natural, less staged, less like you're performing a moment instead of living it.

But an unplanned goodbye tends to land in the middle of the most emotion either of you will feel all day, which is exactly when things get rushed, said badly, or left unsaid entirely.

A little thought beforehand, about what you actually want to say, and what you don't need to, means it's a moment you shaped, rather than one that happened to you while you were too overwhelmed to think straight.

It's kind of like: Writing the last line of the story instead of letting the page just run out.

Try this:

A few days before, each write down (separately) the one thing you most want the other to know before you say goodbye. Trade them, read each other's in the moment, or right before. That way the thing that matters most doesn't get lost in the rush of bags and traffic and last-minute reminders.

Try this / not that

Most of us don't realize how much of our everyday language says "I'll take it from here", even when we don't mean it to. The good news is, this is one of the easiest things to shift, because it's not about changing how much you care, just the shape of the sentence.

Below are ten small swaps: the same concern, the same love, just phrased as a question instead of an answer. Try dropping even a couple of these in this week and see what she says back, you might be surprised!

SWAP THIS	FOR THAT
"What are you thinking of doing?"	"You should..."
"Have you considered ____?"	"You need to..."
"What do you think your next step is?"	"Here's what you should do."
"What's going on for you right now?"	"You always do this."
"How does it feel to be you right now?"	"How are you?"
"Do you want ideas, or just to vent?"	"Here's what I would do..."
"What have you already tried?"	"You should do ____"
"How are you feeling about it?"	"Don't worry about it."
"What makes this feel overwhelming to you?"	"You're worrying about nothing."
"What would you do differently next time?"	"I told you so."

If you're reading this at 11pm, wondering if you're doing any of it right

Ah, wouldn't it be helpful if there was a handbook for parenting.

No parent ever gets it right. Not because you're not trying hard enough, but because of an issue every parent eventually runs into: the same advice that gets ignored coming from you can land completely differently coming from someone else.

Not because you're saying it wrong. But because she's not meant to figure everything out through you. It's not a failure, it's just how growing up works (frustrating, I know).

That's why you can be the most present, loving parent in the world, and she will still need someone outside the family she can talk to honestly.

It's part of why tip nine in this guide was about finding her an aunt, an older cousin, a family friend, someone already in her corner who isn't you. If she's got someone like that, lean on them.

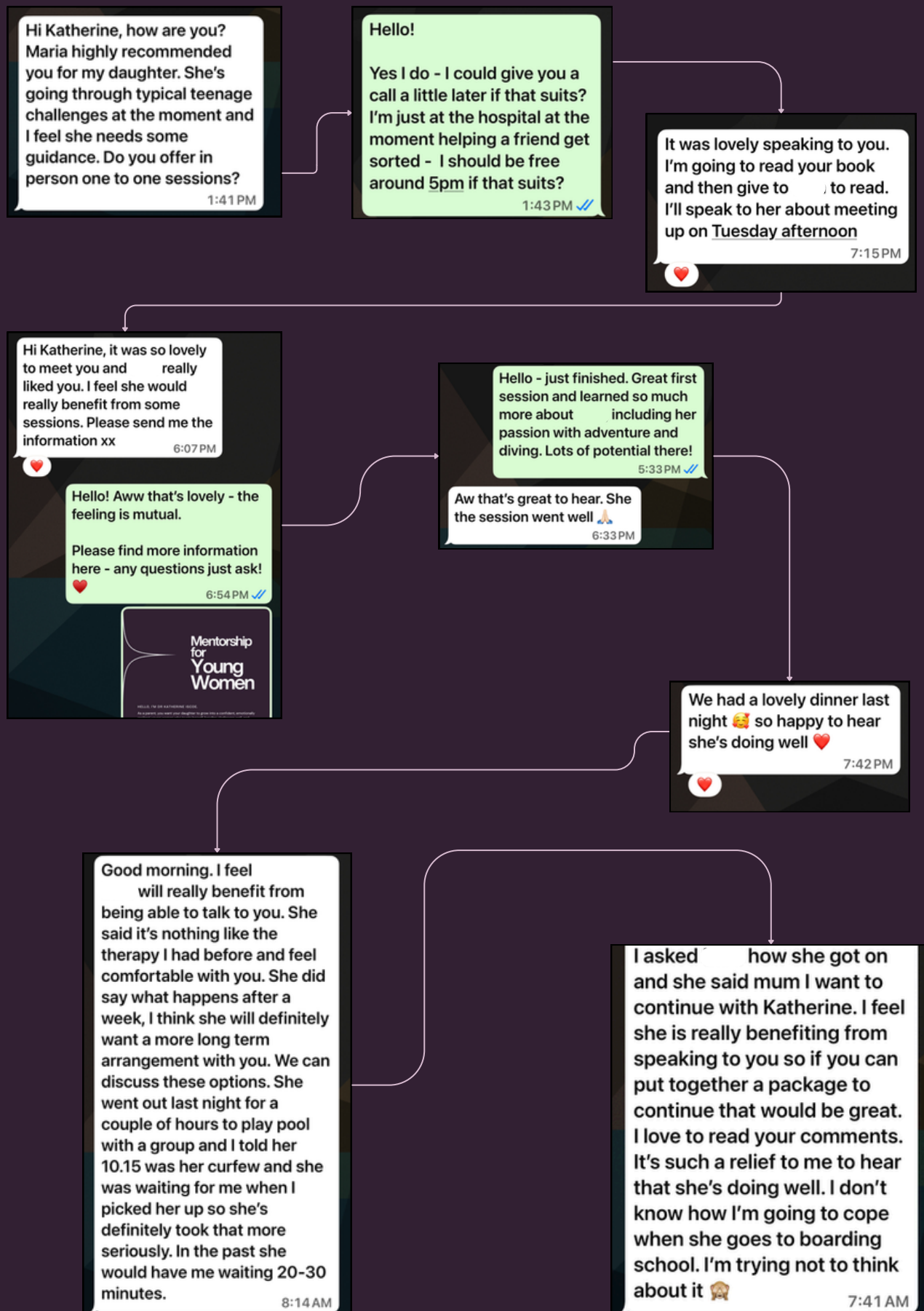
If she doesn't, or you'd like an extra layer of support alongside them, that's where I come in. I'm here to be the person she talks to when it's not you, so that what she's working through doesn't just stay stuck in her head, or get lost because she couldn't say it to the person closest to her.

So if this guide was useful, and you'd like to talk through where things are right now for your daughter, whether that's this transition, motivation, confidence, or just wanting someone in her corner, I offer a free 20-minute call. No pitch, just a conversation.

Book a time by saying hello@drkatherine.com

Dr Katherine Iscoe

A typical journey



7-Day Reset

This is designed to quickly identify what's really going on beneath the surface, so she stops spinning and starts understanding herself differently.

Best for:

A specific challenge, confidence dip, school stress, friendship issues, emotional overwhelm, or as a first experience before ongoing support.

Interrupt

This is ongoing mentorship designed to build emotional resilience, confidence, self-trust, and stronger decision-making in real life, not just in theory. We work through what's actually happening as it happens.

Best for:

Young women who are capable but stuck in cycles that are affecting confidence, performance, relationships, or wellbeing.

Immersion

For a bigger transition or a lot happening at once: a move, a big exam year, burnout, a family change. More frequent contact and deeper support during a season that needs more than a weekly check-in.

Best for:

High-achieving or highly sensitive young women where emotional patterns, pressure, anxiety, or self-doubt are impacting performance, wellbeing, or confidence.

Every level includes a private space for her to be honest, be challenged, and be heard, by someone whose only job is her.

Not sure which one fits? That's exactly what the discovery call is for.

I offer a free 20-minute meet and greet: no pitch, just a conversation about where things are right now for your daughter, and whether this could help.

Book your free meet and greet: hello@drkatherine.com

About Dr Katherine Iscoe

Dr Katherine Iscoe is based in Dubai and works across the GCC. She is a keynote speaker, author of *The Self-Respect Playbook*, and mentor to high-performing women and young women navigating confidence, pressure, identity, emotional resilience, and self-worth.

A former CEO of a dual-listed public company, Dr Katherine is also a summa cum laude graduate who received multiple scholarships and academic awards throughout her career. But behind the achievements and public success was a very different reality.

From the age of 13, Dr Katherine struggled deeply with self-worth, perfectionism, people-pleasing, and the overwhelming need to be liked. That pressure eventually led to years of disordered eating, anxiety, depression, and destructive coping patterns disguised as “high achievement.”

It was through rebuilding self-respect — not just confidence — that everything began to change. Today, that lived experience shapes the foundation of her mentoring work. Her approach helps young women understand themselves more deeply, interrupt unhealthy emotional patterns early, and build the resilience, self-trust, and emotional strength needed to navigate modern life with greater confidence and clarity.

Dr Katherine’s work combines behavioural insight, practical frameworks, honest conversations, and real-world mentorship designed to support young women both emotionally and practically during some of the most formative years of their lives.

Outside of work, she is dog-obsessed, loves murder documentaries, uses sewing as her version of meditation, and still hopes one day to play a therapist in a Hollywood movie.

