

The speech template

1. Open to the room, about 30 seconds

Acknowledge both audiences at once, and signal early that you know how long to speak for.

"For those who don't know me, I'm [name]'s [dad/mum], and I'd like to reassure the back of the room that I've been given four minutes and a list of things I'm not allowed to say."

That does three jobs: introduces you, tells the friends this will be short, and gets a laugh from the family. Never open with "where does the time go".

2. Who they were, about 60 seconds

One story from childhood. One.

Choose it to show character, not cuteness. A story about them being funny, stubborn, kind or determined at seven works. A story about them being adorable at three is for you, not for them.

The test: would they be happy for their friends to hear this? If you're unsure, that's a no.

"When [name] was nine, [he/she/they] decided that [specific thing]. This took four months and involved [detail]. Nobody asked for it and nobody could stop it."

3. The turn, about 15 seconds

Move from the child to the person. This is the whole point of the speech and it should take one sentence.

"Which is more or less exactly what [he/she/they] did last month, except now [he/she/they] drives."

4. Who they are now, about 90 seconds

The part that matters, and the part most parents skip.

Say something true about the adult they've become. Not what they've achieved, but what they're like. Specific, present tense, and observed rather than hoped for.

"[Name] is the person [his/her/their] friends ring at midnight. I know this because I've heard the phone go, and I've heard [him/her/them] get up."

Include one thing you've learned from them. A parent saying "you were right about this and I was wrong" in front of their child's friends is the most powerful thing available in this speech, and it costs nothing.

Then, briefly, one line acknowledging their friends. They're in the room and most of these speeches ignore them entirely.

5. The toast, about 20 seconds

Short. Land it.

"Would you all raise a glass, please, to [name]."

Say "please raise a glass", pause, wait, then the name. The pause is what makes the room do it together.