

# Talking with Elementary Schoolers

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOLERS:

- Naturally communication through play
  - PLAY is a child's language, and TOYS are his/her words!
- Slower sense of time
- Shorter attention span
- Constantly learning and asking questions
- Concrete reasoning (literal) in conversation
- Difficulty explaining their feelings and behaviors
- Complaints of physical pain when feeling anxious, afraid, or sad
- Repetition of concepts and phrases overheard at school

## TALKING To Do's:

- **Stay present**
  - Avoid long lectures
  - Offer a genuine chance to make great choices every day
- **Verbally reflect feelings**
  - Don't just listen, let your child know you understand
  - Pay attention to words and body language
  - If you are wrong, they will correct you
  - If you are right, they will feel understood
  - "You felt really scared when I was late to pick you up."*
  - "You are so excited about this birthday party!"*
- **Explore intent behind behavior and questions**
  - What does your child want most?
  - Examples of hidden motives: Control, connection, comfort, competency
- **Ask open-ended questions**
  - Instead of *"Did you have a good day?"* try:  
*"What was your favorite part of today?"*
- **Use age-appropriate limits when necessary**
  - Acknowledge feeling, Communicate the limit, Target acceptable alternatives
  - "Charlie, I know you are angry, but it's not okay to hit me. You can choose to tell me how angry you are with words, or stomp on this bubble wrap."*
- **Encourage positive processes and character traits (rather than performance)**
  - "You worked really hard to use your words."*
  - "You are showing compassion for your friends."*

## RESOURCES

- How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk (book)
- The Whole Brain Child (book)
- The Kid Counselor, Making Sure Children Feel Understood (article)  
<http://thekidcounselor.com/articles/making-sure-children-feel-understood/>