

# FLATIRONS KIDS ELEMENTARY SURVIVAL GUIDE





## FLATIRONS' VISION

To bring the awesome life of Christ to people in a lost and broken world.

## FLATIRONS' VALUES

- Biblical Authority
  - *"A Better Way To Do Life"*
- Relational Intimacy
  - *"Grace + Truth"*
- Spiritual Formation
  - *"Living A With God Kind Of Life"*
- Excellent Environments
  - *"Bump Into Jesus"*
- Relational Evangelism
  - *"Come And See"*

## NEXTGEN MISSION

To bring the awesome life of Christ to the next generation living in a lost and broken world

## KIDMIN VISION

To help kids discover and learn about the awesome life of Jesus by creating fun, age-appropriate environments and partnering with parents

# WELCOME TO FLATIRONS KIDS!

Are you ready to be a Small Group Leader? We can't wait to have you join the team! Before you start, make sure to read through this Elementary Survival Guide. It'll have everything you need to know as you join the Flatirons Kids team at Flatirons Lafayette, and it's a great place to reference if you forget something!

Here's a few things you should know up front:

## THE WIN

As a SGL, you win when children have meaningful interactions during group that deepen their faith in Jesus and influence their relationships with others.

## JOB DESCRIPTION

What exactly is a Small Group Leader? A friend? A parent? A coach? A teacher? Here's is what we define as a Small Group Leader:

A Small Group Leader connects relationally with a small group of elementary-aged kids by partnering with parents to introduce the awesome love of Jesus through consistently leading small group discussions, engaging in large group experiences and being present in the life of their few.

Every Small Group Leader should do five things:

- **Be Present** - Connect their faith to a community by showing up predictably/mentally/randomly
- **Create a Safe Place** - Clarify their faith as they grow by leading the group, respecting the process and guarding the heart
- **Partner with Parents** - Nurture an everyday faith by cueing the parent, honoring the parent and reinforcing the family
- **Make It Personal** - By your example, inspire their faith by living in community, setting priorities and being real
- **Move Them Out** - Engage their faith in a bigger story by moving them to someone else, moving them to be the Church and moving them to what's next

You can learn more about these principles in the following pages, visiting our website ([flatironskidmin.com/trainings](http://flatironskidmin.com/trainings)) or a copy of the book: Lead Small!



## QUALIFICATIONS

To be a Small Group Leader in Flatirons Kids, you don't have to be a Bible scholar, pass a theological aptitude test or display a particular set of special spiritual gifts. You don't even need to be that cool! Here's all you need to do:

- You love God + are committed to growing in your personal relationship with Jesus
- You care about the next generation
- You are committed to consistently investing + caring for your small group for a minimum of one year
- You understand + embrace the values/vision of Flatirons
- You completed + passed the application, background check, interview + leader agreement process

## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

Here is a list of the 10,000 foot view expectations (but not limited to) as a Small Group Leader:

- Serve weekly
- Show up on time for pre-service Huddles (4:30p/8:30a/10:30a)
- Come prepared by looking at the small group guides and other info (via GroupMe) prior to arriving to your small group on the weekend
- Connect with your Elementary Group's Coach and team of fellow Small Group Leaders often. Do not hesitate to reach out if you ever have any questions/concerns
- Attend special events (i.e. Mega Awesome Costume Party, Hang Nights, Rally Jr., etc.) and trainings (digitally/in-person)



# NEXTGEN LEADER AGREEMENT

Thank you for your interest in serving as a volunteer in an NextGen environment at Flatirons. We appreciate your willingness to take the time to complete the application, interview + background check process. There are a few things we want to make sure we say up front as you jump into being apart of this ministry:

By choosing to enter into a leadership role in one of our NextGen environments, you are entering into a position of authority. Our children and teenagers will watch you closely and take what you say seriously. We think that is a good thing. Leaders should be role models. The challenge is that being a role model is all-encompassing. As a role model, your lifestyle is part of the equation. What you present on Sunday should be consistent with who you are in your various roles the remainder of the week.

In the past, that was all that needed to be said. There was consensus around what constituted consistency between Sunday morning behavior and life in general. As culture has changed; however, there is a need to be more specific. So, here is what we expect volunteers to communicate and model:

- Make a 1-year commitment to the ministry.
- Attend all required Leader Meetings and Trainings.
- Serve consistently.
- Give a Coach or Staff member notice prior to being absent.
- Be an active participant in an adult small group or a community that offers accountability or opportunity for spiritual development.
- Attend Adult Weekend services consistently.
- Live a life of integrity and consistently model Christ in all areas of your life.
- Be an example in your social life, speech, dating, dress, social media, etc.
- I will use wisdom and discernment when consuming alcohol or tobacco in the presence of anyone under the age of 21.
- I will consider my leadership role and those I serve when posting on social media (alcohol, tobacco, politics).
- Be committed to growing in my personal relationship with Christ through Bible reading, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines.
- Be an example, role model, and mentor to anyone you are discipling.

***If you have any questions that these statements may apply to you or you feel like you cannot agree to these statements, we would love to have a conversation with you and potentially assist in finding another area in which you can serve.***

# POLICIES + PROCEDURES

Within the Kids ministry at Flatirons Community Church, we pride ourselves in having set policies and procedures in place in order to create safe and engaging environments for each child. Here are the policies and procedures that pertain to the Kids ministry at Flatirons:

## CHECK-IN + DISMISSAL

Make sure each child in your space or group has gone through the official check-in process. At check-in, they will receive two nametag stickers (they will put on one of the stickers) and one pickup receipt tag (that the parent or legal guardian will hold onto). Once the child comes to the space or group, place the second sticker of that child on the Kids Check-In Sheet located on clipboards in your respective space.

Once adult service is dismissed, keep children in designated group area until the parent or legal guardian comes to pick up the child. From there, a child's tag will be checked by a Coach, Large Group team member or staff member. In the case of a lost tag, please contact a Coach, New Family volunteer or Staff.

## RESTROOMS

Never go into the bathroom alone with a child. If possible and in the case of needing to exit the environment, it's wise to have two adults present (min. one female) whenever a child needs to go to the bathroom. If needed, please alert a Coach, Large Group Team Member or Staff.

## ALLERGIES

Be aware of the allergies of your few - especially any particular food allergies. If you bring food to share with your group, double check with each child (or the parents/legal guardians) to make sure they aren't allergic to anything you're giving them.

## DISCIPLINE

If you have a child who is not following the guidelines that have been put in place, try redirecting the child's behavior (refer to Redirecting Behavior document on [flatironskidmin.com/trainings/sg101](http://flatironskidmin.com/trainings/sg101)). If that doesn't work, have a plan in place to contact the Coach or Staff; so, that they can handle the situation apart from the rest of the group

## SICKNESS POLICY

If a child has had a fever or show showed flu-like symptoms (coughing, vomiting, etc.) within the last twenty-four hours, advise parents or legal guardians that their child should not be allowed in the environment.

## EVACUATION PLAN

In the case of an evacuation, please follow one of our two evacuation plans:

- EVAC Plan - Move kids to the northwest parking lot of the retirement center on the north side of the Flatirons church building

For more details on Standard Response Protocol, please visit [flatironskidmin.com/trainings/srp101](http://flatironskidmin.com/trainings/srp101)

## LOST CHILD PROCEDURE

Should a child get lost after they have been dropped off, immediately alert the Coach and/or Staff while you remain with your group. From there, the Coach/Staff will then get in contact with the security lead via radio. Make sure to know what the child is wearing to let staff/security know what to look for.

## **APPROPRIATE TOUCH**

We value touch and the message of warmth that it can convey; however, physical touch should be age/developmentally appropriate and is only appropriate when done publicly.

Below are the appropriate touch guidelines for preschool-aged and older:

- When welcoming a child, we offer side-hugs, fist bumps or high fives
- No creepy hugs
- There is to be no extended hugging (creepy), tickling (really creepy) or other prolonged physical contact of any kind (exceptionally creepy)
- Lap sitting is NOT permitted
- Never touch a child in an area that would be covered with a bathing suit
- Never kiss a child or coax a child to kiss you
- Never allow a child to touch you in a way that is inappropriate

## **MANDATED REPORTING POLICY**

Flatirons maintains a zero tolerance policy with regards to child abuse and neglect. The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse designed the descriptions below:

- Physical abuse is the use of physical force, such as hitting, kicking, shaking, burning or other shows of force against a child
- Sexual abuse involves inducing or coercing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors such as fondling, penetration and exposing a child to other sexual activities.
- Emotional abuse refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love and threatening.
- Neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education and access to medical care.

Familiarize yourself with the descriptions of child abuse listed above. If you suspect that a child involved in any of the NextGen environments at Flatirons Community Church has been abused, the following procedures should be followed:

- Report the suspected abuse to a staff member
- Do not interview the child regarding the suspected abuse (this could be leading the child)
- Do not discuss the suspected abuse with other volunteers/parents/anyone else
- All information regarding the child should be confidential with staff and the authorities
- You may be asked to complete a Suspected Child Abuse Report

We are legally obligated to protect the children in our care, which means that we are legally obligated to report symptoms that indicate potential abuse. As a NextGen volunteer at Flatirons Community Church, this legal responsibility is shared with you; so, please make your staff member aware of any symptoms within a twenty-four hour window.

# FAQ - WHAT'S LEAD SMALL?

We have a challenge - a BIG challenge. We want to help kids discover and develop an authentic faith - a faith that stays with them when life gets hard, when they have more questions than answers and when they move from phase to phase to whatever is next in their life. We want them to have a faith that lasts.

We believe that the **only way to cultivate authentic faith is through leading small.**

That's why what you do every week matters! When you lead small, you realize that what you do for a few will always have more potential than what you do for many.

When you lead small, you simply make a choice to invest strategically in the lives of a few over time so you can help them build an authentic faith. Here's a few graphics that you should start to familiarize yourself with:



A circle represents a group of kids. Not just any group, YOUR group!



A large orange dot represents YOU. The SGL. Don't you look good?



A small dot represents one individual in your group. Someone you are leading.



A home represents...well, a kid's home. What else would it be?

There are 5 parts of the SGL job description that we'll touch on in the following pages:



**BE PRESENT**



**MAKE IT PERSONAL**



**CREATE A SAFE PLACE**



**MOVE THEM OUT**



**PARTNER WITH PARENTS**

# FAQ - THE ELEMENTARY PHASE?

The Elementary Phase consists of the grades of kindergarten through fifth. During the elementary years, a child will grow in wisdom, faith and friendship. We build their theological foundations through the use of three basic truths:

- **I Need To Make The Wise Choice**
- **I Can Trust God No Matter What**
- **I Should Treat Others The Way I Want To Be Treated**

A phase is a timeframe in a child's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. It's important to know at each phase that our job is simple...to know what can be expected of them and know how they think so they will hear what you say and know what to do.

## THINKS LIKE...

An elementary schooler thinks like a scientist. Scientists understand the world through concrete evidence they can test repeatedly. Like scientists, elementary schoolers learn best when they can observe something in their present environment. They are concrete thinkers and need repetition and clear application. The more frequently a new concept can be connected to everyday experience, the better.

## HOW THEY RELATE TO GOD...

God's story inspires my story. Kids who think like scientists love stories. They relate to a God who heals the sick, conquers evil, explains mysteries, performs miracles, overcomes death and teaches them how to win at life.

## WANTS TO KNOW...

In the elementary years, a child develops skills and competencies that equip their future. The way a child resolves the "Do I Have..." questions of each phase provides them with critical knowledge and resources. The best way to resolve an elementary schooler's relational questions is to consistently engage their interests:

- **Do I Have Your Attention?** - In kindergarten and first grade, a kid craves adult attention and approval. When adults demonstrate interest in kids' progress, kids improve abilities.
- **Do I Have What It Takes?** - In second and third grade, a kid wants to know how their abilities compare with peers. When adults praise kids' persistence and efforts, kids broaden competence.
- **Do I Have Friends?** - In fourth and fifth grade, a kid begins to prioritize friends in a new way. When adults make introductions and include peers, kids develop friendships.

**1**

MOVE KIDS TO  
LOVE GOD BY  
INCITING WONDER

**2**

MOVE KIDS TO LOVE  
LIFE BY PROVOKING  
DISCOVERY

**3**

MOVE KIDS TO  
LOVE OTHERS BY  
FUELING PASSION

# FAQ - HOW CAN I PREPARE?

We want to create the experience for Small Group Leader's to be as smooth as possible. Sometimes, we wish we could say that you could just show up on the weekend and lead a small group; however, we think that would defeat the purpose of being an effective Small Group Leader. Here are different ways that you can prepare yourself to create the best experience for your few on the weekend:

1

## LOOK THE PART

- Wear your name badge so that our security team + staff recognizes you as an approved volunteer in Flatirons Kids
- Dress appropriately for sitting on the floor

2

## BE ON TIME

- Snacks and drinks are on us! Come early to enjoy it before your group arrives!
- Join your team huddle at 430p/830a/1030a

3

## SHOW UP

- Be fully present. Set your phone aside and engage with your kids
- Be consistent. Your regular attendance tells the kids that you care about them

4

## BE PREPARED

- Check your GroupMe! Read the weekly communication that contains vital information and updates.
- Review and understand your curriculum. It is found on [flatironskidmin.com](http://flatironskidmin.com)

## SUPPORT TEAM

1

### YOUR COACH

- Your Coach is your first line of communication and help
- If you aren't able to make it on a weekend, contact your Coach and co-SGL (if applicable) first then staff.
- If you need assistance with a child, ask your Coach for help.

2

### ELEMENTARY STAFF

- We want you to have a great experience serving in Flatirons Kids! Please reach out when you need help or prayer.

3

### OTHER SGL'S

- The SGL's around you on your team have great ideas; use them as a resource.



# FAQ - FACILITATING SG TIME?



1

## PRE-SMALL GROUPS

- Read the small group talk-sheet before you get to Flatirons Kids on the weekend
- Pray for your few and your small group time
- Coordinate with your co-SGL (if applicable) about facilitating group
- Engage kids during the structured connection time

2

## OPENING SMALL GROUP TIME

- Start every opening small group with a casual conversation.
- Allow it to be natural - let them talk about the week
- Set up, through activity or conversation, what the idea of today is about
- Establish a consistent and effective transition into large group
- Sit as a group during large group and be engaged - set the tone

3

## DURING SMALL GROUPS

- Do not be systematic or robotic - be yourself
- Ask great questions while being comfortable with silence
- Do not rush through the activities - this is where it can begin to click for your few

4

## CONCLUDING SMALL GROUPS

- After your last activity, have a 1-2 minute wrap up
- Ask questions about Bible story review and application by giving an action item for the week
- Take prayer requests and write them down

5

## POST-SMALL GROUPS

- Be active in your kids' lives (i.e. birthday cards, dance recitals, soccer games) - if they share something, follow up with them afterwards
- Be aware of how your few are acting - if they are acting "off" or being quiet when that's not normal, check in on them
- If you haven't seen a kid in a few weeks, reach out to them and their family

# FAQ - CREATING A SAFE PLACE?

We want the church to be the safest place for any kid to talk about anything. Our goal in Flatirons Kids is to make kids feel safe, loved, accepted, supported, heard and helped. You are not a counselor and we don't expect you to be; so, we want to equip you with some tools you will need for certain conversations with the kids that you are growing to love.

## ANXIETY (5K SPECIFIC)

Preschoolers experience anxiety just like any other phase—anxiety generally centered around separation from the grown-ups they love, strangers, bedtime, new social situations, fear of new things, and loud noises. What makes it even more complicated for this age group is that they're just learning how to assign vocabulary to their emotions and regulate them in a healthy way. While it may be hard to identify anxiety in preschoolers, stats show 10-20% of preschoolers experience anxiety, and as caring adults in their life, we can help them navigate it in age-appropriate ways.

As a volunteer, your role is to **embrace their physical needs**. Anxiety often presents itself with physical symptoms in pre-schoolers, so if they are anxious you'll probably know it. They might cry, become extra-clingy, or maybe suck their thumb. Preschoolers are **motivated by safety**, so while the words you say are important, your presence with them when they are scared will communicate so much more. Here are tips for how to navigate these situations at various points during conversations:

- **BEFORE CONVERSATION**
  - **Create a welcoming environment.** Kids may want a stuffed animal to hold or want to feel extra comfy. By making your space extra cozy, you can help kids feel safer, calmer, and ready to listen.
  - **Break it down.** You won't be able to use medical terms or abstract ideas. Ask how they're feeling or where they're hurting and use words like "scared" or "nervous" as "anxious" or "stressed" may be difficult for them to understand.
- **DURING CONVERSATION**
  - **Validate their feelings.** Avoid being dismissive by saying what they're nervous about is silly or not a big deal
  - **Practice coping techniques.** Take deep breaths together to regulate their nervous system.
  - **Do something fun.** Play a creative movement game together that requires physical activity to get any nervous energy out and build your connection.
  - **Come alongside them.** Don't try to eliminate every scenario they might feel anxious about. Help them take small steps to face their fear.
  - **Stay present.** Sit with any kid feeling anxiety. Even if you aren't speaking, your presence can help them feel safe.
  - **Check your own feelings.** Kids will pick up your tone so it's important to examine your own feelings of anxiety or nervousness. Work to bring their emotional temperature down.
- **AFTER CONVERSATION**
  - **Talk to their parent or guardian.** Never diagnose or offer unsolicited advice— simply share what the child has expressed.
  - **Connect with Flatirons Kids staff.** Learn what resources we have available to parents and what you should do if you think a kid may need extra support.
  - **Make them laugh.** Fun over time builds connection, so do an activity or have some fun together. This can be helpful after a difficult conversation to help kids feel safe.

## ANXIETY (ELEMENTARY)

Anxiety in this age group is not uncommon, due to the many changes they're facing socially, physically, relationally, and mentally. But anxiety may be more challenging to spot at this phase. Having ongoing conversations about anxiety around a kid may be helpful, even if they don't now they're dealing with it in the first place. One of the best things they can do is learn the difference between good anxiety and bad anxiety—especially as kids are facing experiences like sports, school activities, friendships, and new social experiences for the first time. Good anxiety motivates us—like if we're anxious about our grades, we might choose to study extra hard to alleviate that stress. Clinical anxiety is more problematic because it can have a frequent physical and emotional impact even when it is not connected to a specific circumstance in our lives.

As a volunteer, your role is to **engage their interests** by asking lots of questions and allowing them to steer the conversation (within reason), so they process their feelings and are reminded that God is with them no matter what. Elementary kids are **motivated by fun**, so adding activities will help them stay engaged. Using concrete examples from their everyday life will also help kids understand how to cope with anxiety better. Here are tips for how to navigate these situations at various points during conversations:

- **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Remember how their brains are wired.** Think through some concrete ways to talk about worry and anxiety so that kids can understand the conversation.
- **Engage their interests.** Think of some personal (or fictional) stories that you can share about ways to cope with or overcome anxiety.

- **DURING CONVERSATION**

- **Help them identify the physical symptoms.** Anxiety can oftentimes show up as a stomach ache or feeling jittery.
- **Practice coping techniques.** Take deep breaths together to regulate their nervous system.
- **Ask thoughtful questions.** Encourage a conversation around what is causing them to feel anxious.
- **Validate their feelings.** You may be tempted to just tell them it isn't that bad in hopes that if you downplay it, they can dismiss it. The reality is, the best thing we can do as leaders is to help a kid feel fully seen, accepted, and safe.
- **Come alongside them.** Don't try to eliminate every scenario they might feel anxious about. Help them take small steps to face their fear.
- **Use a feelings wheel.** Help kids name the emotions they're experiencing and find more language for expressing and processing emotions.

- **AFTER CONVERSATION**

- **Talk to their parent or guardian.** Never diagnose or offer unsolicited advice— simply share what the child has expressed.
- **Connect with Flatirons Kids staff.** Learn what resources we have available to parents and what you should do if you think a kid may need extra support.
- **Make them laugh.** Fun over time builds connection, so do an activity or have some fun together. This can be helpful after a difficult conversation to help kids feel safe.
- **Listen for follow-up opportunities.** If a kid said they were nervous about a situation like a t-ball game or math test, set a reminder to ask the kid about it next week so you build trust.

## BULLYING (5K SPECIFIC/ELEMENTARY)

Bullying is any time a person acts in a repetitive and aggressive way toward an individual they perceive as weaker than them. It's possible one of your few may be exposed to or the subject of this kind of behavior, and they may feel scared, ashamed, or defensive. When a kid opens up about bullying, it's because they know you're a safe place. It's possible they could be playing multiple roles— being bullied, being a bully, reinforcing a bully, or witnessing bullying. Keep this in mind when you start a conversation with one of your few, and aim to have that conversation as soon as possible. Be sure to include people who can help—like the child's parent, Flatirons Kids staff member, or a professional. When you begin this conversation, keep in mind that it should be the first of many. To help you get started, here are some words to say and not to say:

- **WHEN THE CHILD IS BEING BULLIED:**

- *"I'm going to help you."*
- *"This isn't your fault."*
- *"How did it make you feel?" (Responses may include feelings like scared, angry, or worried. The younger the child is, the harder it may be for them to pinpoint their emotions, but it's a great step if they can articulate how they feel.)*
- *"I care about/love you, and I need to tell someone who can help us so we can stop this from happening again."\**

- **WHEN THEY ARE THE BULLY:**

- *"Thank you for telling me your story."*
- *"This doesn't change the way I feel about you. I want to help."*
- *"These behaviors are bullying behaviors. They don't make you a bully. It's not who you are. You have a choice whether or not to continue acting this way."*
- *"Let's talk about what we should do next. We might need to bring other people into the conversation, and I'd love to check in with you occasionally to hear how it's going being kind to others."*

- **WHEN THEY'VE WITNESSED BULLYING:**

- *"Thank you for telling me. That was very brave."*
- *"I'm going to help you make a plan. It can be hard to know how to help someone in this situation."*
- *"We need to tell someone so we can help this person."*

- **WHAT NOT TO SAY:**

- Words that communicate you're freaking out. Try to remain calm.
- Words that shame. If they are being bullied, you don't want to ask them anything that makes them feel like they've done something wrong.
- Words that condemn. Keep in mind they're not the sum of their behavior or the behavior that has been done to them. Try to see them as a person who has done something wrong or has had something wrong done to them—they themselves aren't the wrong thing.

## CRISIS (5K SPECIFIC)

What exactly is a crisis in the preschool years? Sometimes, a lost toy or being dropped off at programming can feel like an intense moment, but in reality, we know for most kids everyday experiences are hardly a crisis. A crisis, for a preschooler, may look like the loss of a family member, a change in living arrangements, or a difficult medical procedure. By definition, a crisis is a real or perceived threat that disrupts a child's normal degree of functioning (e.g., physically, emotionally, and/or mentally), thereby requiring immediate support. While we can't prevent all negative experiences, as volunteers, we can create a safe place where kids feel valued and supported. The more support we can give children, the more likely they will heal when bad things happen.

## CRISIS (5K SPECIFIC - CONT.)

As a volunteer, your role is to **engage their interests** by asking lots of questions and allowing them to steer the conversation (within reason), so they process their feelings and are reminded that God is with them no matter what. Elementary kids are **motivated by fun**, so adding activities will help them stay engaged. Using concrete examples from their everyday life will also help kids understand how to cope with anxiety better. Here are tips for how to navigate these situations at various points during convos:

### • **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Stay calm.** When kids we care about experience a crisis, it may trigger our own anxieties or emotions. Allow yourself time to process things on your own before engaging with a child.
- **Keep the environment predictable.** When things feel chaotic in a child's life, keep the environment and schedule as predictable and orderly as possible.
- **Create a calming corner.** Make it cozy and fill it with things to help them calm down.
- **Connect with Flatirons Kids staff.** Before engaging kids, be familiar with our mandated reporting policies as far as reporting if a child is in danger and which resources you can point families to if children need extra support.

### • **DURING CONVERSATION**

- **Let them lead.** It's okay if your conversation lasts 30 seconds or 30 minutes. Kids have an innate way of knowing and asking for what they need, so allow them to process at own pace.
- **Get on their level.** Some kids feel nervous by direct eye contact, so you can also try rolling or throwing a ball or coloring side by side to see if they relax and open up more.
- **Look for the helpers.** Identify and focus on who the helpers were in a tragedy or crisis (firemen, doctors, etc) and how you can pray for them. If appropriate, ask how they can be a helper.
- **Use concrete language.** Kids are literal thinkers, so don't use confusing or abstract phrases.

### • **AFTER CONVERSATION**

- **Circle back.** Kids tend to move in and out of grief. Allow them space to process, but also check in with them regularly and let them know you're there for them.
- **Stay connected to the parent or guardian.** Always share what their child is expressing, being careful not to offer unsolicited advice. Instead, ask what they need and offer your support.

## CRISIS (ELEMENTARY)

It's hard to think about little kids experiencing crisis, but research would indicate it's more likely than we may think. In the elementary years, a crisis may look like the loss of a family member, a change in living arrangements, being bullied, a natural disaster, or even a normal developmental change that just feels really scary. By definition, a crisis is a real or perceived threat that disrupts a child's normal degree of functioning (e.g., physically, emotionally, and/or mentally), thereby requiring immediate support. While we can't prevent every crisis, there is good news. As volunteers, we can help children feel safe and valued. When we help children process their thoughts and feelings, we can help them heal and develop the skills to make wise choices and handle difficult circumstances in the future.

As a volunteer, your role is to **engage their interests**. By initiating conversations about what they enjoy and following their lead as they engage in activities, you can help them feel calmer and safe enough to engage in conversations. Elementary kids are **motivated by fun**. Even though you may think play or activities are inappropriate during crisis, kids need fun and play to help them regulate and think through their experience. You can leverage games that help them name their feelings and feel safe and confident again. Here are tips for how to navigate these situations at various points during conversations:

## CRISIS (ELEMENTARY - CONT.)

### • **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Stay calm.** When kids we care about experience a crisis, it may trigger our own anxieties or emotions. Allow yourself time to process things on your own before engaging with a child.
- **Keep the environment predictable.** When things feel chaotic in a child's life, keep the environment and schedule as predictable and orderly as possible.
- **Create a calming corner.** Make it cozy and fill it with things to help them calm down.
- **Connect with Flatirons Kids staff.** Before engaging kids, be familiar with our mandated reporting policies as far as reporting if a child is in danger and which resources you can point families to if children need extra support.

### • **DURING CONVERSATION**

- **Let them lead.** It's okay if your conversation lasts 30 seconds or 30 minutes. Kids have an innate way of knowing and asking for what they need, so allow them to process at own pace.
- **Get on their level.** Some kids feel nervous by direct eye contact, so you can also try rolling or throwing a ball or coloring side by side to see if they relax and open up more.
- **Look for the helpers.** Identify and focus on who the helpers were in a tragedy or crisis (firemen, doctors, etc) and how you can pray for them. If appropriate, ask how they can be a helper.
- **Listen and repeat back.** Avoid evaluating or commenting on their feelings, but instead, repeat back to them what they are saying.

### • **AFTER CONVERSATION**

- **Circle back.** Kids tend to move in and out of grief. Allow them space to process, but also check in with them regularly and let them know you're there for them.
- **Stay connected to the parent or guardian.** Always share what their child is expressing, being careful not to offer unsolicited advice. Instead, ask what they need and offer your support.

## FAITH (5K SPECIFIC)

Is there anything better than being a small part of a kid's story as they discover and rediscover the answer to this question: "Who is God?" In the preschool phase, these little humans (who think like artists) can relate to an invisible God because they can imagine. God is the One who designed the animals and created the flowers, the One who made them and knows everything about them, who keeps them safe, and who loves them. The key to faith conversations with a preschooler is keeping them developmentally appropriate by matching your faith language with how they encounter the world. In other words, in order to have meaningful faith conversations with a preschooler, get in a preschooler's world.

As a volunteer, when you **embrace their physical needs**, you help a preschooler know God's love and meet God's family. Preschoolers are **motivated by safety**. You can show preschoolers what God is like by being a safe and loving adult presence.

### • **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Remember the phase.** Faith will be a life- long conversation for kids, and not every- thing has to be (or should be) explained in one conversation. Sometimes it's just better to let them put a monkey in the manger scene and spend your hour talking about the wonder of Jesus being born rather than correcting their historical and geographical understanding of Bethlehem.
- **Say what matters most.** Consider what ideas or phrases you most want kids to understand and hear—and then repeat them over and over and over.
- **Get creative.** Think about how you can add movement, fun, art, or music to the conversation.

## FAITH (5K SPECIFIC - CONT.)

### • DURING CONVERSATION

- **Prepare to listen.** Expect tangents, lots of questions, and distractions. That's absolutely okay! Try not to get frustrated if the conversation doesn't go as planned.
- **Ignite their imagination.** They might get some of the details of a Bible story wrong, but if they remember how big God is and that Jesus loves them, it's still a win.
- **Engage their senses.** Since preschoolers think like artists, they learn best through participation and activities.
- **Make it short or add variety.** The attention span of the average three-year-old is about eight minutes. So either make the conversation short or add several different activities to keep them engaged.
- **Repetition is your friend.** The same simple Bible verses and stories taught over time boost their confidence as they understand and memorize.

### • AFTER CONVERSATION

- **Find opportunities to connect ideas.** Look for ways to repeat the big idea you talked about in future conversations and activities.
- **Cue the parent.** Let parents know what you talked about at church—bonus points if you can tell them the way their unique kid responded or reacted during group time.

## FAITH (ELEMENTARY)

Elementary school is a season of discovering how the world works—and how to have fun in it! Kids want to laugh and play and learn. Like little scientists, they begin to combine the wonder they felt as a preschooler, with discovery to search for answers as they ask, “Who am I?”. In this stage, storytelling is a powerful tool for learning more about God and the Bible since abstract thinking can still be a challenge. Story—more than concepts—make for the most effective teaching. Kids relate to a God who heals the sick, conquers evil, overcomes death, and teaches them how to win at life. Kids learn information quickly and easily. But they're still mostly concrete thinkers. They need repetition and clear application. It's essential to connect new concepts to their everyday experiences.

As a volunteer, when you **engage their interests**, you help a kid trust God's character and experience God's family. Elementary-age kids are primarily **motivated by fun**. So, incorporating activities and stories is essential to helping them learn. At the same time, elementary schoolers think like scientists and understand the world through concrete evidence. That's why it's important to use real-life examples and avoid abstract concepts in your conversations about faith.

### • BEFORE CONVERSATION

- **Remember the phase.** Faith conversations are life-long conversations, so not every idea or truth has to be talked about in one conversation.
- **Say what matters most.** Consider one big idea about God you want kids to walk away from the conversation remembering, and let that guide your conversation.

### • DURING CONVERSATION

- **Praise the effort, not just the outcome.** Whether kids get an answer right or wrong, give them positive affirmation that they did a good job thinking. This helps them develop a growth mindset.
- **Get real with illustrations.** Avoid abstract ideas and instead give concrete examples and opportunities for lots of repetition.
- **Have fun!** Add activities, play, and stories because during this phase, kids are motivated by fun.
- **Expect tangents and questions.** Even if you plan to have a conversation about one thing, remain open to where kids lead the conversation.
- **Be okay with questions.** The church should be the safest place for a kid to ask questions. Even if you don't have an answer, praise the question and be willing to explore it together.

## FAITH (ELEMENTARY - CONT.)

### • AFTER CONVERSATION

- **Keep your promises.** If you said you would explore a question or if they tell you about something big happening in their life, follow up. This builds trust.
- **Celebrate your wins.** It's too easy to focus on the negative, so reflect on conversations that went well. Focus on small wins. Remember that you're making a difference just by showing up consistently.
- **Cue the parent.** The faith conversations that really stick happen all week long—so make it a point to remember a specific way each kid interacted with the lesson to relay to parents at pick up. This will help them repeat that conversation during the week.

## HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS (5K SPECIFIC)

Every kid needs tribes over time to give them belonging. And your small group is a great place for that kind of connection to take place! As a small group leader, you're a significant member of a child's tribe. So keep in mind that your conversations about friendship matter—even during this early phase of preschool. Your words could serve as the foundation of how a kid views and forms their own friendships.

A marker of the preschool phase is that everyone is a friend. The mailman. The neighbor down the street. The cashier at the grocery store. The family dog. To a preschooler, friends come in all shapes, sizes, genders, and species. The key to discussing friendships with a preschooler is to keep it basic, specific, and concrete—keeping your focus on what it looks like to be a good friend. Acting out situations, playing games, and funny stories are the best teachers in this phase. Here are a few ideas of what to say—and what to avoid saying—when leading discussions about healthy friendships:

### • WHAT TO SAY:

- *What does it mean to be a friend?*
- *Do you watch any shows or read any books about friends? How do they treat one another? What type of things do friends do together?*
- *Friends are kind and loving to one another. What does it mean to be kind and loving?*
- *Good friends ask one another questions. Let's take turns asking each other questions like friends.*
- *Friends share with one another. Who shares with you? Who do you share with?*
- *Friends use nice words when they play together. What are some examples of nice words?*
- *Has a friend ever made you sad or hurt your feelings? What did you do? What did you say?*
- *Have you ever seen someone sitting or playing by themselves? What did you do? How could you be a friend to them?*
- *Friends forgive one another. What does it mean to forgive someone?*

### • WHAT NOT TO SAY:

- *If someone hurts your feelings, they're not a good friend.*
- *You should choose one friend and that's it.*
- *If you don't have lots of friends, maybe you aren't very nice.*

## HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS (ELEMENTARY)

Every kid needs tribes over time to give them belonging. And your small group is a great place for that kind of connection to take place! As a small group leader, you're a significant member of a kid's tribe. So keep in mind your conversations about friendship matter. Your words could serve as the foundation of how a kid views and forms their own friendships.

## HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS (ELEMENTARY - CONT.)

Elementary schoolers are all about fun. And nothing is more fun than friends! At this age, friendships can change from week to week. Sometimes they change from day to day! But their importance isn't marginalized by their inconstant nature. Not getting invited to a sleepover or being the last kid picked for the kickball game can be heartbreaking to a kid. Even the seemingly small things, like not sitting by your favorite friend at lunch, can be a big deal to an elementary schooler.

And as the phases progress, so does your group's capacity to compel one another. To shape one another. To critically affect one another. So take care with how you approach the topic of friends—even during this early phase of elementary school. No fight is too silly or disappointment too small to unpack. Here are a few ideas of what to say—and what to avoid saying—when leading discussions about healthy friendships with elementary schoolers:

- **WHAT TO SAY:**

- *"What's your favorite show, book, or movie about friends? How are they good friends to each other?"*
- *"Tell me about how you met your best friend. What kind of things do you enjoy doing together?"*
- *"Name three words that describe a good friend."*
- *"Think about a time a friend has made you angry or sad. What happened?"*
- *"If you wanted to become a friend with someone new, what would you do?"*
- *"Have you ever felt like you needed to 'tattle' on a friend?"*
- *"Have you ever wanted something a friend had? What happened?"*
- *"Friends forgive one another. What does it mean to forgive someone?"*
- *"If you saw your friend being mean or rude to someone, what would you do?"*

- **WHAT NOT TO SAY:**

- *"Everyone should be your friend."*
- *"You can only have one best friend."*
- *"If you don't have lots of friends, maybe you aren't very nice."*
- *"If someone hurts your feelings, you shouldn't be their friend."*
- *"Don't be friends with \_\_\_\_\_. They're not a good influence."*
- *"\_\_\_\_\_ isn't a good friend."*

## TECHNOLOGY (5K SPECIFIC)

Young children learn about the world through direct experience with it, using all their senses. So it's not uncommon to see toddlers mimicking us swiping on our phones or holding a toy up to their ears, pretending to talk. You can partner with parents to help determine what the children in your care need, and the best way for you to help. Sometimes that means leveraging technology, and sometimes it doesn't. The intentional use of technology can be a great tool to help them develop self-control, early literacy, and math skills, plus positive attachments with other people.

As a volunteer, your role is to **embrace their physical needs**. Leaders can leverage technology to ease transitions, create warm environments, and build trust. Young children think like artists, taking in the world using all their senses. In addition to hands-on experiences, technology can be used to safely tap into the natural wonder kids are born with. Preschoolers are **motivated by safety**. As leaders, we can also use technology to help them know they are loved and seen. Certain types of technology can be used to help establish more trust, develop a young child's self-regulation, and build their confidence. Here are tips for how to navigate these situations at various points during conversations:

## TECHNOLOGY (5K SPECIFIC - CONT.)

### • **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Honor the parent.** Survey the parents of your group to learn about their rules so that you can respect them and their screen time boundaries in your programming and conversations.
- **Evaluate.** How are you currently using (or not using) technology in your group? Think about ways to leverage or adjust your technology use to make volunteering easier and keep preschoolers engaged.
- **Connect with Flatirons Kids staff.** Learn any policies around technology use such as which apps are approved or rules around taking pictures.

### • **DURING CONVERSATION**

- **Make it personal.** How do you use your own technology while leading your group? When you choose to put down your phone and engage a preschooler, you show them you care and build trust.
- **Choose your words wisely.** Pay attention to how you talk about technology because kids in your group may have varying levels of access. Speak in a way that includes everyone and doesn't assume anything.
- **Make it work for you, not against you.** Use technology to meet kids' needs, such as using music to get the wiggles out, dimming lights to help calm the room, or screens to help with transitions. Alternate between more active and more passive activities and louder and quieter activities so that preschoolers stay engaged but not overstimulated.

### • **AFTER CONVERSATION**

- **Reflect.** Ask yourself how technology can be improved or adjusted during group to engage kids and help them learn.
- **Follow up with Flatirons Kids staff.** If there are technologies that would make volunteering easier and your group time more effective, let them know.

## TECHNOLOGY (ELEMENTARY)

Elementary-aged kids are drawn to screens. While children often can't wait to have their own devices, they need our help to learn to transition from time using technology and time doing other non-screen activities. Attention is like a muscle that can be strengthened, and middle childhood is a great time to start building healthy habits as they relate to screen time. The elementary phase is a great opportunity for you as a volunteer to focus even more on face-to-face interaction and creating a community where kids feel seen and valued, in addition to using technology when it is the best choice for your time together each week.

As a volunteer, your role is to **engage their interests**. Technology can be used to tap into the natural curiosity and questions kids have. We can also use technology to help kids bond with us through shared experiences (Mario Kart, anyone?) and to connect with friends and family over common interests. Elementary-aged kids are **motivated by fun**. We should play as often as possible on their level in ways they like and feel confident in. We can also leverage certain types of technology to teach in engaging ways and build friendships

### • **BEFORE CONVERSATION**

- **Honor the parent.** Survey the parents of your group to ask what their rules are so that you can respect them and their screen time boundaries in your programming and conversations.
- **Make it personal.** Do a quick evaluation of your own digital footprint. Make sure your accounts reflect the kind of role model and digital citizen you want to be.
- **Consult with Flatirons Kids staff.** What are the policies involving kids and technology? Check the age recommendations and reviews before using apps or games with kids. Ask if they have received parental consent around things like taking and sharing photos.

## TECHNOLOGY (ELEMENTARY - CONT.)

### • DURING CONVERSATION

- **Choose your words wisely.** Pay attention to how you talk about technology because kids in your group may have varying levels of access. Speak in a way that includes everyone and doesn't assume anything.
- **Think about learning styles.** Use (or don't use) technology intentionally to engage kids and help them learn.
- **Listen closely.** Pay attention when kids are discussing what they are doing and seeing online. Be sure to follow up and connect with their family or another appropriate adult if you hear anything concerning.
- **Set an example.** Be intentional about your own engagement with technology. By putting away your phone and being present, you demonstrate healthy habits and boundaries.

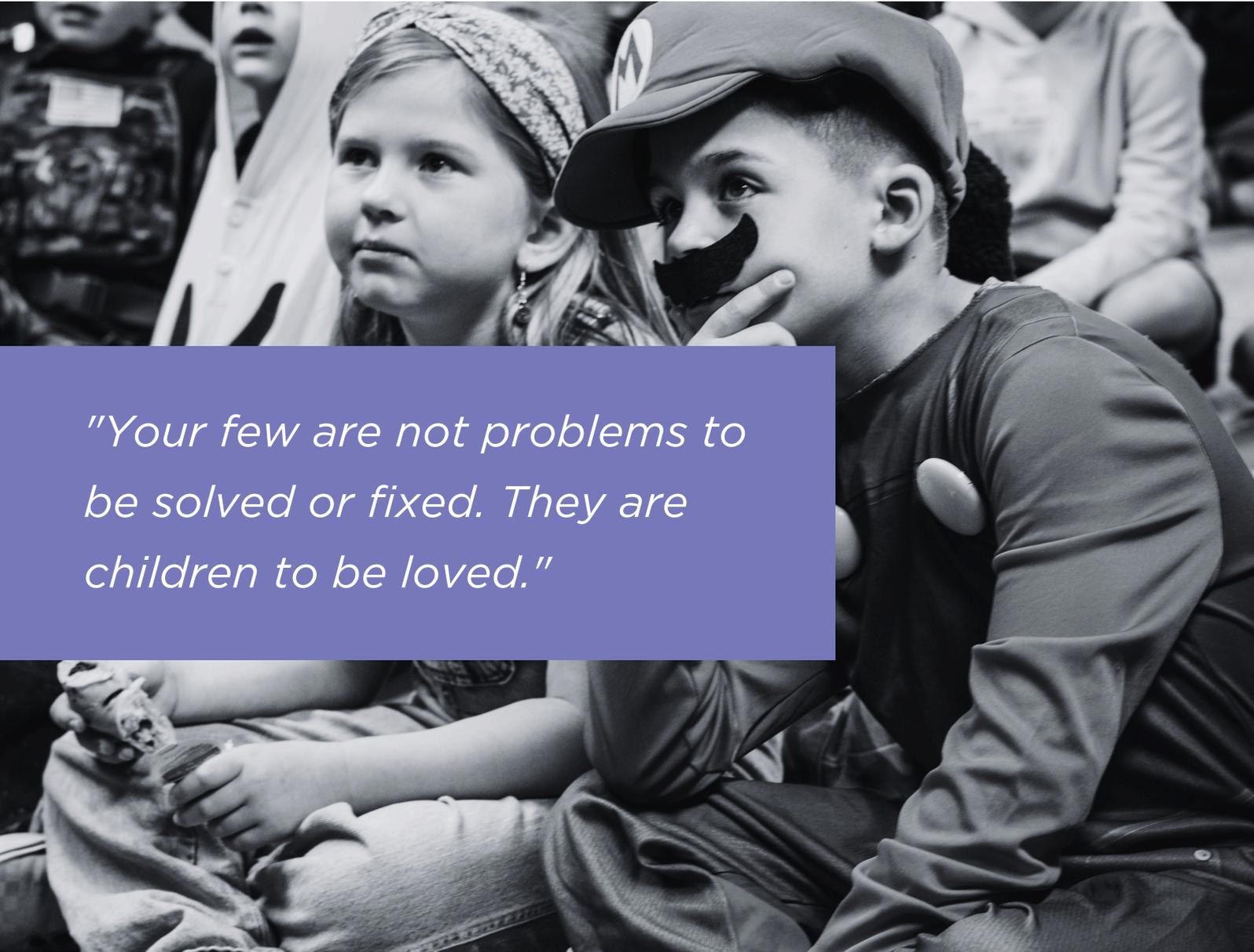
### • AFTER CONVERSATION

- **Follow up with parents and caregivers.** If you hear anything concerning to you related to a child's engagement with technology, schedule a time to chat.
- **Do your research.** Become a student of any creators or apps kids share about. By learning more about their interests, you will not only be more equipped to help navigate conversations, but it will show you care about them.

*If you have had one or more of these conversations with your 5K'ers or elementary-aged kids, then congratulations - you are winning! It is evidence that you have created a safe place for your few to talk about anything, and that is most definitely a win.*

*Working with kids poses a unique set of challenges. The preschool and elementary years are filled with rapid growth alongside confusion and pressure from all angles. You are positioning yourselves as listeners, mentors, role models and guides in their lives. The authentic relationships you build with your kids allow them to feel more comfortable opening up to you about any difficulties they may be facing in their lives.*

*Thank you for being intentional with your few!*



*"Your few are not problems to be solved or fixed. They are children to be loved."*



---

[flatironskidmin.com](http://flatironskidmin.com)