

Preparing Parents and Caregivers: What to expect every step of the way

Community-Based Mentoring



About Big Brothers Big Sisters

OUR MISSION is to provide youth facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better, forever. **OUR VISION** is that all youth achieve success in life.

Big Brothers Big Sisters has been bringing a little magic into the lives of children by matching them with adult volunteers in fun and rewarding relationships since 1904.

Who are our Big Brothers and Big Sisters?

- Men and women who work and live in your community.
- High school and college students from nearby schools
- Retirees, military men and women, members of congregations or civic organizations
- Ordinary people

What they all have in common is a sincere interest in being a friend and mentor to a child. They are not paid – all their time is volunteered.

How do we select Volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters?

Each volunteer must complete a screening process that includes:

- A written application
- A nation-wide criminal history record check
- Local and national sex offender registry check
- At least three references
- A thorough interview
- Home safety assessment
- Orientation and training process that will help to encourage your child's healthy development

Who are our Little Brothers and Little Sisters?

Most children in our community-based programs come to us through their parent or caregiver. We also reach out to involve children through churches, youth service agencies, and other referral sources.

When they get together, what do matches do?

They go places and do things that they both enjoy doing! They typically meet 2-4 times a month. They may go biking, fishing, to a show, go walking in the park or to a ball game. They also might bake a cake or build a birdhouse.



As a parent/guardian, we need you to be an active partner in your child's match.

Working together, Parents/Care Givers, volunteers, and BBBS staff members plan activities and opportunities that can have a powerful and positive impact on your child.

You as a parent or caregiver should know about each activity and give your approval in advance.

When your child returns home from an activity with their Big, it's very important that you talk openly with them about the activity.

What did they do? Where did they go? Who else was there?

Make sure that your child feels okay when they're with their Big.

How BBBS Works with You, Your Child & the Big

B BBBS works hard to support the relationship between Bigs and Littles. Our goal is for the relationship to be as successful as possible for everyone. Bigs and Littles work with their Match Support Specialist/Team from their BBBS agency.

It is important for us to talk with you and your child EVERY MONTH for the first year of the match. A Match Support Specialist **needs** to talk with you and your child regularly to assure your child's safety and to provide support, and offer ideas if problems arise. **If your contact information change at any time, please remember to let us know! If we can't reach you, your child's match may have to close – and we really don't want that to happen!!**

Your Match Support Specialist is the main link between you, your child, the Big, and BBBS!

But that's not all that the Match Support Team provides for your child's match!

They can also:

- Connect you with community resources.
- Keep you updated on activities offered by the agency.
- Help you communicate with your child and their Big

- Work with you on any conflicts that might come up.

Here are some good reasons for calling the Match Support Specialist:

- To question your child's safety or well - being
- Discuss general concerns you are having about the Big Brother or Big Sister
- Report any changes in address or phone number
- Report any emergency situations or your child's illness
- Report any important family changes
- Report success stories about your child's progress or special honors



Your Role: You Are an Active Partner!

We know it takes a special parent/care giver to get a Big Brother or Big Sister for their child. Parents/care givers are important partners in helping to build a meaningful friendship between their children and volunteers.

What you can do to help:

- Be welcoming to your child's Big!
- Talk to your BBBS match support staff!
 - During the first year, monthly calls or visits from your BBBS Match Support Specialist are required.
 - You can discuss your child's experiences: what activities have they been involved in, what does your child say about the outings? What makes you happy about being in the program?
- Share your concerns, hopes and wishes for your child with your BBBS Match Support Specialist.
 - They will tell these to your child's Big and help them in planning activities that are fun and educational.
- Help find the best times for outings to occur, and make sure that your child is prepared
 - Proper clothing, ready on time, limited spending money if needed.
- Make sure that you know details of each planned activity and have given your approval in advance.
 - Know when your child will be picked up and when you can expect them back.
 - Make a point of being home.
- Always ask about what the activities were, where they took place, who else was involved and your child's feelings about the visit.
- Please don't talk about your child with the Big Brother or Big Sister when the child is present.
 - If there is something you think they should know, call them when your child is away.
- Please don't ask that siblings be included.
 - This is special for your child.
 - Do participate in events and agency sponsored activity that invite parents and the rest of the family to join in.
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters **are** "older friends."
 - **They are not** substitute parents, baby sitters, disciplinarians, financial support, taxi service, or counselors.
- Time with a Big is special.
 - Don't punish your child by saying they can't see their Big.
 - Often, this one-to-one adult time will actually help your child's overall behavior.
 - Restricting outings as a punishment could result in having to close the match.
- Be flexible.
 - Remember that the Big Brother or Big Sister is a volunteer and has a busy schedule too.
 - Both you and the volunteer should make sure to call ahead to cancel any planned visits.
- Help make sure that your child returns phone calls and stays in regular contact with the volunteer.
 - Regular contact is important to the success of the match.
- Overnight outings between the Big Brother/Big Sister and your child **are only allowed after they have been matched for one year, after an overnight permission slip has been signed, and then only after a consultation with a Match Support Team member.**

- Give the relationship time to grow.
 - This relationship needs time to develop so try not to judge it too quickly.
- Please do not assume that the volunteer has lots of money.
 - Volunteers know that they are responsible for costs during outings.
 - Parents are encouraged to send money with their child but it is not required.
 - Parents are not permitted to ask the volunteer to buy their child things or borrow money.

Remember, we all have the same goal – the health and well-being of your child!

In summary, the top rules are:

- 1. Know what your child is doing with their Big**
- 2. Communicate any concerns to BBBS staff**

Child Safety – A Top Priority

Children’s safety is our #1 priority. We focus on the child’s safety and well-being throughout the match, not just at the beginning.

CHILD PROTECTION IN BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS:

We want to work together to keep your child safe. While our staff carefully screens each volunteer, we need your help to make sure the relationship is healthy, and the volunteer is making good judgments about your child’s safety on outings.

- You should approve all activities
 - If you are not comfortable with an activity that the Big suggests, you are encouraged to not approve.
 - Talk to your BBBS match support staff when you have questions.
- When your Big takes your child out, the Big should always stay with them and not leave them with someone else.
- Your child’s Big should not use alcohol or other drugs before or during activities with your child.
- Your child’s Big should not use physical discipline or yell at your child.
- If an activity involves changing clothes to go swimming, there should be separate changing and showering places. If they go on an approved overnight, they need to sleep in separate beds.
- Volunteers should never ask a child to keep a secret.
- Volunteers might want to buy an occasional gift for your child.
 - They should ask your advice about this first.
- Volunteers should not engage in tickling, wrestling, giving backrubs, or asking a child to sit on their lap.
- Showing pornography or sexual material is never acceptable.

Here are some patterns that you should discuss with your Big Brothers Big Sisters’ staff:

- Your child’s Big wants to spend more and more time with your child.
- Your child’s Big often invites other children to join them in activities
 - Siblings, child’s friends, etc
- Activities **always** take place in **private** settings
 - Volunteer’s home, camping setting, overnight visits - instead of more public settings
- Your child’s Big takes an excessive amount of pictures or videos of your child.

We know that you work with your child to teach them skills to help keep them safe from violence – whether it’s online, at school, at home and in your community. Please feel free to discuss these issues and any others issues related to child safety with your BBBS Match Support Staff. We want to work with you to keep your child safe.

It’s important that parents communicate openly and often on these subjects.

REQUIRED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

Big Brothers Big Sisters staff members are required to report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child. Our staff and volunteers are trained to respond if a child tells them about abuse. A report will be filed with authorities. Additional information about child abuse and neglect can be found in the Empower Children Guide.

If you have any further questions or would like more information on violence prevention, please don’t hesitate to ask our staff for additional resources.

GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES FOR PARENTS AND VOLUNTEERS

- **The start of a match is an adjustment time for the volunteer, child, and parent (guardian).** Relationships take time and action to develop. Try to be patient and don’t expect quick changes. The combined effort, support and approval of the volunteer and the parent can create a successful match and make family life easier.
- **The volunteer is providing a service to the Little’s family and the Big Brothers Big Sisters agency.** The volunteer’s time and financial limitations need to be respected and appreciated. Everyone can help build the relationship by saying “Thank You”, being courteous, discussing the joy of visits together and positive changes noticed in the home situation.
- **The parent’s rules and discipline need to be respected.** We encourage clear communication between the parent and volunteer regarding the limits and schedules of the child.
- **We expect consistent, reliable contact between the volunteer and child so that a healthy, trusting relationship can develop.** If this is not occurring, call your case manager. The volunteer and child are expected to see each other 2-5 hours each visit, 2 to 4 times a month.
- **Please do not “ground” a child from seeing the volunteer.** We suggest that the situation be discussed with the volunteer and by mutual consent, possibly, the outing can be restricted in some way, rather than canceled. Not allowing a child to have regular visits with a volunteer, as a means of discipline, will result in termination of that child from the program.
- **Parents please be considerate of volunteers.** When your child is ill or recovering from an illness, the child should not participate on outings with the volunteer.
- **It is appropriate for volunteers to set ground rules and correct misbehavior during a visit.** We do not permit physical punishment (spanking, slapping) or withdrawal of visits as a means of discipline. Volunteers will do their best to redirect and if redirection isn’t working, the volunteer may end the outing and take the Little home, assuring them that they will try again another day.

- **The volunteer has the responsibility for arranging the time of visits.** Clear arrangements for the visit need to be made with the parent.
 - The volunteer should arrive at the agreed upon time and the child should be ready to go.
 - The child should be well groomed and dressed appropriately for the activity and the weather.
 - The volunteer is responsible for the supervision, safety and welfare of the child during the visit. **Reminder volunteers:** We require the use of car safety belts for the child when you are traveling together. Children under the age of 8 MUST be in a booster seat. Children under age 13 need to sit in the back seat of a vehicle having passenger air bags.
 - The child should be returned home at the agreed upon time. If this is not possible, the parent should be notified.
 - Prior agreement needs to be made for the child's return home, when the parent is not going to be there.
- **If it is necessary to cancel or be late for a visit, please call.** Allow as much time as possible because the closer the cancellation or delay is to the expected outing, the more disappointing it is and damaging to the relationship.
- **Little will not visit Big's home for the first 3 months of the match relationship.** After the match relationship has reached 3 months, matches must discuss a home visit with their assigned Match Support Specialist. After the initial visit to Big's home, each visit after needs to be discussed with and approved by the parent.
- **It is prohibited for an adult volunteer or a minor child to use alcohol or illegal drugs prior to a visit or during any time they are in the presence of one another.** It is illegal for children under the age of 18 to possess or use tobacco products. Volunteers, please be courteous of your Little's sensitivity and do not smoke in their presence if warranted.
- **Family members or friends of Bigs or Littles are not encouraged to participate on outings on a regular basis.** Our program philosophy is based on a one-to-one relationship.
- **We expect you to let our agency know of any changes in your living situation** – address or phone change, marriage or job change, serious illness, etc.
- **The agency staff does not see overnights as necessary to a good match.** Overnights may only occur with the mutual consent of the parent, volunteer, and the agency case manager. An overnight cannot occur within the first year of the match. Prior to the first overnight visit, the parent must provide written consent to our office and the case manager must approve. Separate sleeping facilities (rooms) are required.
- **Generally, the volunteer is expected to pay for the cost of activities and transportation.** The parent is encouraged to help out, but we recognize that this is not always possible. We suggest that the volunteer avoid spending money on the child except for activities, projects done together and special occasions.
- **It is necessary for you to have monthly contact with a Match Support Specialist.** Failure to maintain monthly contact with BBBS may result in your removal from the program. We are here to offer support and guidance to all involved in the match relationship. If you are having any difficulties in the match, we ready and willing to offer helpful suggestions. If you are having personal or family problems, we may also be able to help with them or direct you to someone who can.
- **Children, parents and volunteers accepted into the program must complete all mandatory training requirements before a match can be proposed and completed.**
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Information about the child and/or family situation may not be shared

outside of the program.

The preceding guidelines have been set up for the benefit of the child and to aid in the success of the match. Continued problems in one or more of these areas may result in termination from the program.

If you ever have a situation where your child talks to you about any abuse or violence they are subject to, contact BBBS immediately. Our response to the disclosure by a child can prevent negative outcomes for the child and their family. For that reason, it's critical that volunteers follow our BBBS protocols on reporting abuse.

Communication Tips for Parents and Caregivers

- **Even when you are busy, make the time to talk with your child.** Sometimes the best discussions take place while you are driving the car or cooking supper.
- **Listen to the “Little Stuff.”** If they know you are listening, they are more likely to trust you enough to talk about everything in their life.
- **Listen between the lines.** Because most kids find it hard to talk about things that really matter, you need to listen hard to what they may be trying to say
- **Ask their opinion.** We all like it when someone asks our opinion.
 - *You don't have to ask about just important issues – ask them simple things too.*
 - *Would they rather go visit Aunt Denise or Grandma today?*
 - *Do they prefer McDonalds or Burger King?*
 - *What do they enjoy doing most with their Big?*
- **Don't interrupt.** Give your children some extra time to explain their opinion or desires, even if you think you know what they are going to say.
- **Catch them doing something good!** Take that opportunity to praise them and tell them that you are proud of them.

**From everyone at Big Brothers Big Sisters
THANK YOU!**

