



# Preparing Volunteers: What to expect every step of the way.



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# 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.

**B**ig Brothers Big Sisters has been bringing a little magic into the everyday lives of children by matching them with adult volunteers in fun and rewarding relationships since 1904. We are very excited that you are considering being a volunteer with our agency!

Friendship is a powerful thing. It's fun, most anyone can be a friend and it's important. Experiencing fun activities together and forming a trusting bond with a child can have a powerful and positive impact on the child.

We have two basic ways you can meet with your Little to build a fun friendship.

1. As a Big you can meet with a Little in the **community** at a time convenient for both you and the child. You can take in a movie, go wash your car or whatever else might be a fun way to spend some time together.
2. Bigs and Littles can meet at the Little's **school** or other **site** typically at the same day & time each week.

Who are our Littles?

- Children from our community who could benefit from having a positive adult role model.
- Children who like to have fun.
- Age 6 to 18.

How do children come into the program?

- Most children in our community-based programs come to us through their parent or care-giver.
- Most children in our school-based programs come to us through a teacher or counselor.
- We also reach out to involve children through churches, youth service agencies, and other referrals. All children and their parents must want to be in our program.

## Your Role as a Big

**T**he success of the match friendship depends greatly on the efforts of the Big, the Little, and the Parent. Each one plays an important role in helping build a meaningful friendship.

### What is the role of a Big?

Once you are matched with your Little, it will be important for you to understand more about your role in their lives.

### *Successful Bigs...*

- Emphasize friendship over changing the behavior of the child.
- Are not authoritarian.
- Decide activities together with Littles.
- Are consistent & dependable.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Are patient.
- Focus on having fun.
- Set boundaries and limits.
- Acknowledge that positive impact on the child comes after the relationship is built.
- Put a child's safety and well-being first.

### *A Big Is Not a...*

- Parent
- Financial support
- "Taxi" service.
- Babysitter
- Peer
- Therapist

## What Will You Do? - Expectations

**W**e all had someone in our lives, other than a parent, who made a difference to us. This is what you can do for a child in our program. It's really pretty simple - it's a matter of making yourself available on a consistent basis. It's showing you care. It's having fun with a child. It's listening to them talk about whatever is going on in their lives. It's a series of small, teachable moments that, in the end, make a BIG difference.

Changes in your Little tend to occur slowly. Your Little may not call you or suggest activities for you to do-this is normal behavior. Often Littles won't say "thank you" –but this doesn't mean they aren't enjoying the time with you. It just takes time for the relationship to form.

## ***To make the most of your relationship...***

- **Be a good friend.**
  - Listen, have fun, take time to get to know this new person in your life. Choose activities that you both enjoy and that will strengthen the bond between you. Don't set out to impose mandatory changes in the Little. Positive behaviors will flow after your Little trusts you and your Little grows in being more secure, not by your declaring mandatory new behaviors that the Little has to do.
- **Be Consistent.**
  - Show the child you think your time together is important.
    - Be on time for outings.
    - Don't cancel outings unless there is an illness or emergency.
- **Work for a long-lasting relationship.**
- **Realize that problems may come up.**
  - It's normal for problems to arise in a match relationship.
  - Try to balance your expectations of what it will be like with your Little and be realistic about how fast the relationship will take to develop.
- **Be involved and participate in agency activities.**
  - This connects you with other Bigs & Littles and allows your Little to interact with other kids in the program.
- **Regularly communicate with your Little, the parents and your Match Support Specialist.**
  - We will contact you each month to help when needed and give you feedback on how you're making a difference.
  - Anytime you are unsure about what to do or how to handle a situation, we are here to help. You are welcome and encouraged to reach out to BBBS anytime during the time of the match.

## ***The Match Support Specialist will...***

- Give you ideas about low cost, fun and learning activities you can do with your Little.
- Provide help on specific topics to you when you need it.
- Help you work through any problems you might have with your Little and/or his parents.

## **Enrollment**

To make the best match possible and assure child safety, BBBS will gather information to learn more about you. This happens by...

- **Completing extensive background checks**
- **Completing reference checks such as spousal or equivalent, personal, employer, and any applicable youth service organization**
- **Meeting for an in-depth Interview**
- **Completing a home assessment**

Once the preliminary steps are completed, we search for a Little who has the same interests as you! When we find a Little who we think will be a great match, we will call you and tell you about them. If you agree, we call the Little and their parent/guardian and we tell them about you. If everyone agrees that you two will make a great match, we schedule a BBBS facilitated meeting to introduce you! Then you and your Little can start having FUN!!

# How to Create a Partnership with Your Little's Parent/Guardian

**P**arents have entrusted their child to you. They remain the leaders in their family and it's important that we respect and honor that. The parent's support is critical to the success of the match. It may take a while to establish your role with the parent. Listed below are some ways you can work with the Parent/Guardian.

- **Communicate with them before and after an activity.**
  - Describe what you plan to do and what you've done together.
- **Make sure they are aware of activity plans and ask if the activity is ok.**
  - Do not rely on the Little to tell the Parent/Guardian about plans.
- **Let them know about any changes in plans.**
- **Respect the privacy and confidentiality of your Little's family.**
- **Maintain a primary relationship with your Little.**
  - Do not become overly involved with the rest of his/her family.
- **Talk to your Match Support Specialist about any concerns you have about your Little/Little's family or your Little's well-being.**

## 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.***

We do this by providing:

- Thorough professional screening.
- Child Safety and child abuse prevention education programs for volunteers, parents and children.
- Guidelines that establish appropriate boundaries and respect a child's right to feel safe.
- Ongoing BBBS Match Support contact with each party in the match. This helps provide up-to-date information about safety issues and early warnings of potential problems throughout the match relationship.
- The BBBS Match Support Specialist maintains *required* consistent scheduled contacts with each member of the match party.

As a Big you play a role in supporting the parent's primary role of keeping their child safe. Bigs need to model appropriate behavior as well as assume responsibility for their Little's safety during outings.

Some safety issues include internet safety, bullying and violence prevention, the Little's medical condition and child abuse prevention.

Our agency has expectations and guidelines relating to Child Safety. We expect you to know and follow these guidelines.

## 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 Little 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.



## BBBS Support - How BBBS Works with You & Your Little

**B**BBBS works hard to support the relationship you have with your Little. Our goal is for the relationship to be as successful as possible for everyone. Bigs and Littles work with a Match Support Specialist/Team from their BBBS agency. This specialist also works with the Little's parent / guardian.

Along the way to forming a safe and lasting friendship your Match Support Team will be in touch with all of you to help you and your Little. Sometimes they will call, meet you in person, or email you to make contact. Monthly communication is required for the first year of the match and quarterly communication is required after the first year throughout the life of the match. This allows us to provide support, give you ideas for activities, etc. You can think of your match support specialist as the main link between you, your Little, your Little's parent and the agency.

### ***That's not all that the Match Support Team provides for your match!***

They also:

- Provide you feedback on how you're making a difference.
- Find information and resources that you might be interested in.
- Offer group activities and give you activity ideas for you and your Little.
- Hook you up with donated tickets to community/sports events.
- Keep you updated on activities offered by the agency.
- Help you communicate with your Little and their parent.
- Work with you on any conflicts that might come up.

### ***You don't need to wait to hear from your Match Support Specialist - they love to be contacted by their Bigs!***

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

- To get feedback from the Little, and Parent/Guardian about how the match is going.
- Share fun stories about your match.
- Discuss concerns you are having with your match or the safety of your Little.
- Ask for activity ideas and find out about current events at BBBS.
- Report any emergency situations.

## How You Can Make A Difference

It's pretty simple. By building a trusting friendship with a child you can make a powerful impact in their life. That's what it's all about.

Here are some thoughts on making a difference:

- Consistently sharing activities together (events, having lunch, just talking) is the biggest factor in forming a positive relationship with your Little.
- Deciding *together* what activities to do fosters a stronger relationship.
  - This can be challenging at times! Littles are often very agreeable and will go along with whatever you say. Talk with a Match Support Specialist for ideas that can help your Little open up!

- By being there you are making a difference - even if you don't think you are.
- If you're concerned about not making a difference, talk it over with a Match Support Specialist.



Think back to when you were younger. Who was the person in your life who made a difference to you? It may have been a neighbor who taught you a new skill, a cousin who took you to your first ball game, an aunt, uncle, or family friend who taught you how to play catch, ride a bike, fly a kite, or do your math homework.

We have all had someone in our lives, other than a parent, who made a difference to us. By committing to being a Big, this is what you can do for a child. It's so simple. It's just a matter of making yourself available on a consistent basis and showing you care. It's having fun. It's listening to them talk about things going on in their lives. It's a series of small, teachable moments that instill a sense of wonder, warmth, and magic into a child's life.

When you become a Big Brother or Big Sister you become a trusted friend to a child. Everyone needs a trusted friend. And both of your lives will be forever changed by the experience.

## What happens after you meet your Little??

**Now that you are matched with your Little; you may be thinking what comes next and how fast will it happen?**

**A**s every experienced Big will tell you, the friendship takes time to develop. It is a different experience for every Big and Little, and no doubt your friendship will be unique.

However, there are some **common stages** that most match friendships will go through at different times, usually depending on the level of trust that has been established.

### BEGINNING STAGE

**From the first meeting to approximately the four-month mark.**

*What does this stage look like?*

- You both are trying to figure out each other.
- Littles may try to get their Bigs' approvals or impress them.

*What can you do to move it along?*

- Without prying, learn facts about your Little and reference them in your conversations.
  - Favorite things, best friend, where they've traveled.
- Be consistent and flexible.
  - Do what you said you were going to do.
  - Work with the family's schedule as they work with yours.
- Be patient and remember that relationships have ups and downs.
  - Building a friendship takes time and effort.

### GROWTH STAGE

**From approximately the four-month mark to the one-year mark.**

*What does this stage look like?*

- This is the most crucial time regarding the development of the Big/Little relationship.
- This is the time that may be a turning point in the relationship.
- It is common, around the four-month date, that your Little will begin testing you to see what you are really about and how much he/she can get away with.
- Your Little may be observing you to find a reason not to trust you.

*What can you do to move it along?*

- Show your Little that they can trust you, through your reliability, consistency, and time together.
  - As trust develops, your Little will probably begin sharing bits of information here and there with you.
- Keep in close contact with the Match Support Specialist for ideas.
- Recognize and praise accomplishments.
  - Littles love to be encouraged and seen for their accomplishments!
- If you need to give advice or address behavior problems, give reasons; avoid "shoulds."

## MATURITY STAGE

**This stage begins somewhere around the one-year mark.**

*What does this stage look like?*

- You will notice your relationship with your Little has become more positive and realistic and match activities are less structured.
- Most Bigs have shed their preconceived notions regarding the match and their Little.
- As the friendship matures, you will see the maturity of your Little as they grow and develop.

*What can you do to move it along?*

- Develop long term shared interests, activities that you will do frequently together and that you both enjoy.
- Identify past shared experiences and enjoy shared "jokes."
- Learn something new to both of you, together.

## CLOSURE STAGE

Your relationship with your Little will change in many ways over time. The Big and/or the Little may decide it is time for a "transition." As each friendship is different, there could be a variety of reasons why a match would transition to closure. Here are a few to consider:

- Change in where you or your Little lives
- Change in life circumstances
- Feeling that you have successfully taken your Little through a critical stage
- Change in school the Little is attending
- Declining interest as the Little grows older
- Decreasing times that the Big and Little are meeting
- Challenges in the match, the match can end its regular pattern of meetings.
- All BBBS matches "close" when the Little reaches age 18 or graduates from high school.

BBBS will "close" the file of your match and will not continue providing regular support to the match.

## ALWAYS REMEMBER!!!

- ❖ No matter the reason or the length of the match, you and your Little have given a lot to each other and going through this transition should be handled in a sensitive, thoughtful, and caring way.
- ❖ Recognize that you have made an impact at some level on your Little.
- ❖ The Little you now know is probably not the same Little with whom you were initially matched. Changes probably have occurred. Celebrate the experience as much as you can together - highlights and hurdles!
- ❖ Working closely with the child's parent/guardian make a plan for some form of continued contact that feels appropriate to your match circumstances. This may be as limited as exchanging greeting cards at holidays or as intense as continued regular contact with an 18-year-old going off to college.
- ❖ **If the transition of closing the match is not approached carefully, a child can be hurt by the experience.** Our staff will work with you, the child and his/her parent to help you with this transition.

## Strategies for Common Problems

Over the years we have seen some common problems that can occur in any match. These are called common because they are, well...*common*. It's normal for Little/Big relationships to experience some of these situations.

We've collected some examples of these common problems and included them for you in the next few pages, including some tips on how to handle them. After your match gets going, if you are experiencing one of these challenges, you can bring the issue up with your Match Support staff and discuss in more detail how to proceed in a successful way.

### What do I do if...?

#### *My Little doesn't show appreciation.*

- Coming into the match with a preconceived notion of how your Little should show appreciation will set you up for a letdown. Your Little may not say "please" and "thank you" when you first start meeting, and even after many times together he/she may still not respond in a way that you deem appropriate.
- 👉 "I had a good time" may eventually be a response but may be a long time in coming. Sometimes they might only say, "It was okay." Be sure you model the behavior you would like your Little to demonstrate and be consistent.

#### *My Little doesn't share feelings and/or initiate conversation.*

- You may feel that your Little is not putting as much into the relationship as you would like. The relationship may seem one-sided for a long time with you doing the talking, but your Little not saying much.
- 👉 Eventually your Little may well respond in a more open and honest way, trusting you and confiding in you as an adult who will not disappoint or walk out on him/her. Conversation between you will grow and your Little may share more feelings with you. If this happens, rejoice in it, but remember that no relationship is perfect and all relationships are defined in a variety of ways.

#### *My Little never calls me.*

- Littles love to receive phone calls, but seldom feel comfortable initiating them. Asking your Little to share with you the good feeling that comes from getting a phone call may help him/her to understand that adults also like to receive calls from people they like. Giving your Little definite times to call may help, as can enlisting the parent's help in encouraging your Little to call.
- 👉 It is important not to stop calling with hopes that they will start calling you. It is important to be patient and be sure to reinforce the behavior with positive remarks when they do call.

#### *My Little doesn't act the "right way".*

- Your Little may come from a family with a very different value system than yours. It is not your responsibility or role to try to change the values of your Little. Your match is a learning experience for both of you. If your Little has never been to a play, they may not know what behavior is expected of them.
- 👉 Try to be content with the understanding that, through your example, your Little may come to respect values that are more positive. But this may be a long process.



### **My Little doesn't seem to need me.**

- Every child should have someone to bring a little magic to them, but your Little may not respond in a way that makes you feel you are needed. Feeling needed may be expressed by your Little in small ways, and may be non-verbal.
- 👉 In time, you may learn to recognize small signs that your Little needs you. This will help you in being content with the knowledge that you are making a difference and are a much-needed part of your Little's life.

### **My Little doesn't make time for me.**

- Your Little may seem to have little time for you but be assured that, although other activities and family issues may appear to interfere, your Little is benefiting from the interest and involvement of a caring adult friend. You are the person spending one-on-one time with your Little; listening; sharing and showing your desire to be together on a regular basis.
- 👉 No group activity, school event or family commitment can take the place of your special relationship with your Little. If you recognize the importance of what you are doing, chances will increase that your Little will recognize this too.

### **My Little doesn't seem interested?**

- Keep in mind that we all demonstrate interest in different ways, and your Little may not know how to communicate that he/she is interested.
- 👉 Be sure you do not make assumptions based on your Little's behavior, and talk to your Support Specialist if you have questions.

### **My Little doesn't want to improve?**

- Your Little may have many adults' eager to tell what they are doing wrong.
- 👉 What your Little will respond to is someone who will point out and praise strengths. These strengths (assets) can range from the values that the child holds to things he/she is good at doing. If your Little knows that you are going to be positive, give encouragement and compliments, and appreciate the unique person that he/she is, change will happen in very positive ways, and your Little will grow in confidence, competence and caring.

The most important thing to remember is that you will need to be **patient** and **persistent** throughout your relationship! Your relationship may take time to develop, but if you are able to manage your expectations, be open to surprises, and accepting of your Little as an individual, you are in for a fantastic ride! Your Match Support Specialist is available to help you through any of the above situations. Remember to seek help as necessary.



## Transitioning the Match through Formal Closure

**A**s we described above, there is a transition stage in a match where the pattern of activities together may become less frequent. For various reasons the match can end its regular pattern of meetings and transition into closing the match.

Hopefully this transition is very positive for both you and your Little. The transition may lead to continued contact between you and your Little on some level, but it's important to note that any continued contact outside of BBBS' formal program guidelines should only occur at the discretion and with the expressed permission of the child's parent/guardian.

At the time of transition, BBBS closes the file and does not continue to provide professional support or guidance to the matched parties. At that point, the match is no longer considered an active match. We hope that you will stay involved with BBBS and we hope that you might consider taking on another Little.

Ideally, this transition period can be a positive time for setting up patterns that will be long-lasting for the relationship between the Big and the Little. You may decide to keep in touch and to get together regularly as your friendship continues into the adulthood of the Little. You may decide to contact each other occasionally by phone, emails, cards, and get-togethers such as for birthdays.

You have invested a lot into each other. You want to communicate to your Little your appreciation of them and your hope and expectation that they will be successful and happy.

### **Guidelines for Closure:**

- Never just stop and disappear from the match
  - *This could have a very negative impact on your Little.*
- The closure process gives an opportunity to review the great stuff that happened during the match.
- Your Match Support Specialist will walk you through the process - there are several steps to take which can maximize the positive effects.

# THANK YOU!

**A**s your match begins, and throughout the entire life of your match, we want to THANK YOU! You are stepping forward on a journey where you don't know exactly what will happen, but you are doing this because you care about the future of the youth in our community, and you know there are great rewards, positive outcomes, and many benefits for those who have trusting friendships.

We wish you all the best in your match with your Little. Have great fun! Take pride in your contribution to the happiness of your Little!! We will be with you and supporting you throughout your journey.

