Big Brothers Big Sisters

Site Based Preparing Volunteers Guide

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Preparing Volunteers Guide

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About BBBS

Big 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. OR

2. Bigs and Littles can meet at the Little's **school** or other **approved site** typically at the same day & time each week. Activities take place at the school/site most likely with school personnel and other matches meeting at the same times. These matches do not meet outside of the school or site.

History and Purpose:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Virginia established a Site-Based Mentoring Program during the 1996-1997 school year. This pilot project was evaluated at the end of the school year to determine if it should be continued or terminated. The project was determined to be successful so a decision was made to continue the program and expand into other schools as the Big Buddy Program. At present, we now provide these services to 25 elementary schools throughout the region as our Site-Based Program.

We know that students benefit from the individual attention provided by carefully screened Big Brothers/Sisters. Each Big meets with his/her Little one (1) hour per week, or every other week, during the school year to provide support, encouragement, and a positive role model. Bigs should not be viewed primarily as tutors, although some might do this activity. Big Brothers/Sisters could have lunch with their Little Brother/Sister, work with them on reading, play an educational board game, shoot baskets, or just sit and talk. The main purpose is to meet the needs of children within an approved setting. Teachers and guidance counselors work together to select those children in need of one-on-one attention. The teachers have reported an improvement in the child's self-

esteem, behavior, attendance and academic success over the years this program has operated.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Virginia recruits, screens, and trains the Big Brother/Sisters. The agency also monitors the relationship and (with input from school personnel, parents, and Big Brothers/Sisters) evaluates the success of the program. Bigs are selected from various occupations and age groups. Students are selected by the teachers and guidance counselors.

A key component of this program is location. It is Site Based so there is NO contact (phone or otherwise) between the Big Brother/Sister & Little Brother/Sister outside of the approved setting. Big Brothers/Sisters sign an agreement to this effect prior to the initial meeting. Big Brothers/Sisters are required to sign a logbook and be identified each time they enter the approved site facility. The Brothers/Sisters contacts occur only during specified hours.

Big Brothers Big Sisters staff serves as the liaison between the Site Based facility and the Big Brother/Sister to facilitate scheduling. Also, agency staff would be available to handle any problems that may arise.

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 Site-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

The success of the match friendship depends greatly on the efforts of the Big, the Little, and the School Partner. Each one plays an important role in helping build a meaningful friendship.

What is a "Big"?

It won't be long before you meet your Little Brother or Little Sister for the first time. And, when you do, it will help for you to understand your role as a Big.

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.
- Communicate on a level the Little can understand
- Listen well and act as a sounding board
- Have a positive self-esteem
- Are able to help the Little without doing their work for them
- Reinforce the Little's accomplishments & respect the child's dignity

What a "Big" Is Not

- Parent
- Financial support
- Peer
- Therapist

What Will You Do? - Expectations

We 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.

Kids Who Feel Better About Themselves Do Better in School.

Site-Based Mentoring is not a classroom program, and it's not tutoring. Site-Based Mentoring is one-to-one mentoring that takes place in the approved site facility. Of course, some Littles do talk with their mentors about class, or do homework, or read together, but it's really all about friendship and guidance.

You can play or jump rope or shoot hoops — whatever you and the Little enjoy.

Changes in your Little tend to occur slowly. 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.
- Regularly communicate with your Little, the school/site and your Match Support Specialist:
    - We will contact you each month to provide assistance and give feedback on how you're making a difference.
    - Anytime you are unsure about what to do or how to handle a situation, your Match Support Specialists are here to help.
- Work toward 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.

Your Match Support Specialist will:

- Give you ideas about fun and learning activities you can do with your Little.
- Provide help on specific topics to you when you need it.
- If necessary, help you work through any problems you might have with your Little and/or the approved site personnel.

Have Fun. Make a Difference. Make a Friend.

How to Get Involved – Enrollment

- BBBS will gather information to learn more about you.
    - **Interview**
    - **References**
    - **Child Protective Services Registry check**
    - **Criminal history record check**
    - **Information from another BBBS agency or other service organization where you may have volunteered previously**
- If agreeable to all parties you get matched with a child.
- Start having FUN, making a difference in the life of a child, and enjoying your new friend.

A Top Priority-Child Safety

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.
    - If you ever have a situation where your Little talks to you about any abuse or violence he/she is subject to, contact your Match Support Specialist immediately. Our response to the disclosure by a child can prevent negative outcomes for the child and their family. For that reason, it is crucial that volunteers follow our BBBS protocols on reporting abuse.
- 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 site's primary role of keeping the child safe. Bigs need to model appropriate behavior.

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

BBBS Support - How BBBS Works with You & Your Little

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 their Match Support Specialist/Team from their BBBS agency. This specialist also works with the Little's school.

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. Communication will initially happen two weeks after you are first matched and then every other month 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 approved site personnel 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.
- Give you activity ideas for you and your Little.
- Help you communicate with your Little.
- 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 approved site 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.
- Report any emergency situations.

Contact your Match Support specialist by phone and/or email--whichever is most convenient for you.

Telephone: (434) 528-0400
E-mail: agency@bigcva.org

If your Match Support specialist is not available please contact the agency for assistance. We make it a priority to serve you when you need it.

You Can Make a Difference in the Life of a Child

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

Here are some thoughts on making a difference:

- **Consistently sharing activities together (having lunch, just talking) is the biggest factor in forming a positive relationship with them.**
- **Deciding <u>together</u> what activities to do fosters a stronger relationship.**
- **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 your Match Support specialist.**

Ground Rules

1. Sign in and out at the approved site facility; pick up notices or information relating to your student, school activities, or early closings, and please wear school badge while on school grounds.

2. Gifts to mentees often result in jealousy by other students. It also sets a standard with which other Big Brothers/Sisters are uncomfortable. Please limit gift giving to small rewards for a job well done, birthday, or the like. A new pencil, key ring, book, or magazine to interest your Little Brother/Sister are excellent examples of acceptable gifts.

3. NEVER engage in criticism of those in authority.

4. If you are dissatisfied with approved site personnel, address your concern to the Match Support Specialist that is assigned and we will help.

5. Confidentiality is mandatory. There may be opportunities to see test scores or to hear things about your Little Brother/Sister. These should not be discussed outside of the site facility. If the parent of your Little asks about the child's progress, refer them to the teacher or principal.

6. All mentoring and lunch sessions are to be held on approved site grounds during specified hours. In the event you go out side, please let the site personnel know of your whereabouts (out in the play areas, etc.). Lunch may be brought in or you may purchase lunch in the cafeteria.

7. Dress can be casual, but should reflect positive role-modeling.

8. If you must miss a mentoring session, please call the site and leave a message for your Little Brother/Sister. Little Brothers/Sisters look forward to your visits. It is important to let them know that you did not forget about your session. We understand that there will be times when you will have to miss a session but it is crucial that you call to cancel.

9. If your Little reaches out to you with problems which require specific help you are unable to give, please contact the Guidance Counselor or Match Support Specialist for assistance and guidance. Also inform the Guidance Counselor and Match Support Specialist immediately if you suspect the child is experiencing abuse or neglect in the home.

10. Do not initiate physical affection (i.e., hugs or kisses). If a child hugs you, it's okay to respond naturally.

PLEASE INFORM BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS WHENEVER YOU EXPERIENCE A CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT, ADDRESS OR TELEPHONE NUMBER SO WE CAN KEEP YOUR RECORDS UPDATED.

Benefits of Mentoring….

For the Big Brother/Sister:

- **Allows both the adult and the child to form a positive, healthy relationship.**
- **Helps the adult develop and sharpen their skills in working with youth.**
- **Provides a sense of satisfaction that comes from helping others.**
- **Improves personal morale.**

For the Little Brother/Sister:

- **Each type of mentoring can offer something a little different. Mentoring benefits all young people by providing them with positive adult role models.**
- **Mentoring can be the bridge to health and well-being in the midst of many difficult choices.**
- **Helps form positive relationships with caring adults.**
- **Helps increase motivation in school and career.**
- **Helps reinforce the importance of education.**
- **Helps enhance self-esteem.**

Valuable Relationships

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

As 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.

HONEYMOON STAGE

From the first meeting to approximately the four-month date.

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: e.g. favorite things, best friend, where they've traveled.
- Be consistent and flexible, do what you said you were going to do.
- Be patient and remember that relationships have ups and downs, and don't "happen" by themselves.

GROWTH STAGE

From approximately the four-month date to the one-year date.

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 he 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 your Support Specialist for ideas.
- Recognize and praise 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 anniversary date.

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 he/she grows and develops.

What can you do to move it along?

- Identify past shared experiences and enjoy shared "jokes."
- Learn something new to both of you, together.

- **Transition and "Closure"**
- 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.
- 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 school to help you with this transition.

Children - Ages & Stages

If you haven't had recent experience with a child in the age group you'll be matched with, we have some information to help you work successfully with your Little.

We've created handouts for each of the age categories listed below. These handouts are designed to provide you with some general characteristics of children in each of the four different age categories:

- 5-7 year olds
- 8-10 year olds
- 11-13 year olds
- 14-16 year olds

These handouts may help you understand what your Little might be like depending on his/her age. They also include some suggested activities. Just ask your Support Specialist for copies.

As you read the handouts:

- Keep in mind that they are generalizations.

- While they may provide a description of children in general, you may encounter something slightly different with your Little. This does not mean that there is something wrong with your Little. It may mean that they are not like the average child.

- Sometimes a child's development may be delayed because of trauma or negative experiences or simply a slower or faster development than others, so the stage they're in at present may not correlate to their age in years.

Developmental Stages of Children

Age Six

Physical Development

1. Growth proceeding more slowly, a lengthening out. Large muscles better developed than small ones.
2. Eleven to twelve hours of sleep needed.
3. Eyes not yet mature, tendency toward farsightedness. Permanent teeth beginning to appear.
4. Heart in period of rapid growth.
5. High activity level – can stay still for only short periods of time.

Characteristic Behavior

1. Eager to learn, exuberant, restless, overactive, easily fatigued. Relatively short periods of interest.
2. Self-assertive, aggressive, wants to be first, less cooperative than at five, keenly competitive, boastful.
3. Whole body involved in whatever he/she does. Learns best through active participation. Inept at activities using small muscles.
4. Inconsistent in level of maturity evidenced: regresses when tired, often less mature at home than with outsiders.
5. Has difficulty making decisions.
6. Group activities popular, boys' and girls' interests beginning to differ. Much spontaneous dramatization.

Special Needs

1. Encouragement, ample praise, warmth, and great patience from adults.
2. Ample opportunity for activities of many kinds, especially for use of large muscles.
3. Wise supervision with minimum interference; help in developing acceptable manners and habits.
4. Friends come and go quickly.
5. Concrete learning situation and active, direct participation. Some responsibilities, but without pressure and without being required to make complicated decisions or achieve rigidly set standards.

Age Seven

Physical Development

1. Annual expected growth in height; two or three inches. In weight; three to six pounds. Growth slow and steady.
2. Losing teeth. Most seven year olds have their six molars.
3. Better eye-hand coordination. Eyes not yet ready for much close work.
4. Better use of small muscles.

Characteristic Behavior

1. Sensitive to feelings and attitudes of both, other children and adults. Especially dependent on approval of adults. Able to assume some responsibility.
2. Interest of boys and girls diverging. Less play together.
3. Full of energy but easily tired, restless and fidgety, often dreamy and absorbed.
4. Little abstract thinking. Learns best in concrete terms and when he can be active while learning.
5. Cautious and self-critical, anxious to do things well, likes to use hands.
6. Talkative, prone to exaggerate, may fight verbally instead of physically; competitive.
7. Enjoys songs, rhythms, fairy tales, myths, nature stories, comics, television, movies.
8. Concerned about right and wrong, but sometimes prone to take small things.
9. Rudimentary understanding of time and monetary values.

Special Needs

1. The right combination of independence and encouraging support. Acceptance at own level of development.
2. Chances for active participation in learning situations with concrete objects.
3. Adult help in adjusting to the rougher ways of the playground without becoming too crude or rough. Warm, encouraging, friendly relationships with adults.

8 to 10 Year Olds

General Characteristics

1. Interested in people, aware of differences, willing to give more to others but expects more.
2. Busy, active, full of enthusiasm, may try too much, accident-prone, interest in money and its value.
3. Sensitive to criticism, recognize failure, capacity for self-evaluation.
4. Capable of prolonged interest, may make plans on own.
5. Decisive, dependable, reasonable, strong sense of right and wrong.
6. Spends a great deal of time in talk and discussion, often outspoken and critical of adults although still dependent on adult approval.

Physical Characteristics

1. Are very active and need frequent breaks from tasks to do things that are fun for them and involve use of energy.
2. Bone growth is not yet complete.
3. Children experiencing early or rapid growth may be upset with their size.

Social Characteristics

1. Can be very competitive.
2. Are choosy about their friends.
3. Team games become popular.
4. Worshiping heroes, TV stars, sports figures is common.

Emotional Characteristics

1. Are very sensitive to praise and recognition. Feelings are hurt easily.
2. Because friends are so important during this time, there can be conflicts between adult's rules and friend's rules. You can help by your honesty and consistency.

Mental Characteristics

1. Their idea of fairness becomes a big issue.
2. Are eager to answer questions.
3. Are very curious and are collectors of everything; however, they may jump to other objects of interest after a short time.
4. Want more independence, but know they need guidance and support.
5. Wide discrepancies in reading ability.

Developmental Tasks

1. Social cooperation
2. Self-evaluation
3. Skill learning
4. Team play

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?"

"My Little doesn't show appreciation."

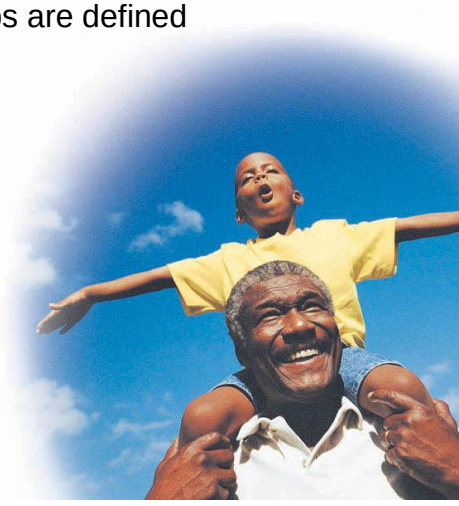
- Coming into the match with a preconceived notion of how your Little should show appreciation will set you up for a letdown. Your Little may not say "please" and "thank you" when you first start meeting, and even after many times together he/she may still not respond in a way that you deem appropriate.

- "I had a good time" may eventually be a response, but may be a long time in coming. Sometimes he/she might only say, "It was o.k." 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 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 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 she/he is 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

About 4-6 weeks before the end of the school year, match support staff will begin to talk to you about what will happen at the end of the school year. Matches may be encouraged to communicate over the summer, through e-mails, phone calls, or at agency sponsored activities. In some cases there may be a temporary suspension of the match over the summer and then match with same or different youth the following school year. The ideal is to encourage matches to continue their relationship the next school year.

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.

You have invested a lot into each other. You want to communicate to your Little your appreciation of him/her and your hope and expectation that he/she will be successful and happy.

A few Guidelines:

- Never just stop and disappear from the match--this could really have a negative impact on your Little.
- The transition/file closing 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!

As 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 for others and you know that there is great reward in life in the relationships you develop.

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

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