



FAQ's: Being a Big

Have questions regarding your role as a Big? You're not alone!

Choose your program and take a look at the list of common questions to find an answer.

Have a question of your own? Contact your Match Support Specialist and we'll post an answer to share with the BIG community! If you do not know who your Match Support Specialist is, call our office at 508-752-7868 and someone will assist you.

FAQ's: Site-based

Have questions regarding your role as a Big in your Site-based program?

Check out the list of questions below for some tips on dealing with common match concerns and questions:

Q: I'm unable to get in contact with my Little. They're not answering texts or phone calls - what do I do?

A: It's possible that your Little's phone is no longer in service, they lost their SIM card, or had their phone taken away. Try contacting the parent/guardian, or have your Match Support Specialist do so.

Q: Is it okay to give my Little my cell phone number or friend him/her on social media?

A: We strongly recommend that you **do not** use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to communicate with your Little. This is

especially true for Littles who are under 13 years of age, which is the legal age to use any of the mentioned websites. If you choose to disregard our recommendation, please take into careful consideration the following pros and cons before determining the appropriateness of becoming “friends” with your mentee:

PROS

- Youth utilize social networking more than they use email. It may be easier to communicate with a young person if you are connected through social media.
- Your Little may feel closer to you if you are connected through social media.
- Social media provides an opportunity to share information quickly through the use of status statements and messages.

CONS

- Social networking can blur relationship boundaries.
- Little’s who are “friends” with their Big may see information, language or pictures that are not appropriate for them to see because of the nature of their relationship.
- Bigs may see things on their Little’s profile that are questionable in nature. Questions arise regarding what needs to be reported to the program and to the mentee’s parents. Reporting on these things may cause the mentee to lose trust in the mentor.

**If you do choose to “Friend” your Little on a social networking site, PLEASE be sure to secure any information, language, or pictures that are not appropriate for them to see by adjusting the privacy settings of your site.

Q: My Little isn't here today, what should I do?

A: It's okay to feel disappointed or frustrated, but try not to take this situation personally. Miscommunication and scheduling problems are common early in a match, and your youth may not be used to scheduled social activities. The best thing to do is contact your Match Support Specialist, who can help you work through it with your youth and your youth's parent. You can reduce the chance of a no-show by using these tips:

- If possible, meet the same day and time each week.
- Set up your next outing each time you meet.
- Be sure to communicate with your youth's parent about your scheduled activity. This increases the likelihood that your youth will be home and helps ensure that a parent will be home when you pick up and drop off your youth.
- Call the day before to confirm plans and call again before you leave to pick up your youth.

Q: I think my Little and I ran out of things to talk about. Any suggestions?

A: One option is using interactive activities such as board games to take the pressure off of the child to make conversation for a while. Conversation tends to come more naturally when you're having fun. Additionally, you can practice your active listening skills and asking open-ended questions.

Active Listening involves paying attention to verbal and non-verbal messages to attempt to understand both the content and emotion of what the other person is saying. The time in which you are actively listening is not the time to be planning or delivering your own message. Active listening encourages honesty, builds respect and affection, and is the first step towards problem solving.

Open Ended Questions help maintain an active dialog without interrogating by asking questions which cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." They are helpful when dealing with youth and teenagers especially, who tend to answer questions with the least amount of words possible. Some great open ended questions to ask your Little could be:

- What is the most amazing thing about you?
- Tell me about the best teacher you ever had.
- When you feel sad, what cheers you up?
- What are the qualities that make you a good friend?
- If you could decorate your whole house, what would it look like?
- What is the nicest thing a friend has ever done for you?
- If you were to have a weird, unusual pet, what would it be?
- Which of your friends are you proudest of? Why?

- Tell me three things you remember about kindergarten.
- If you could trade lives with somebody you know, who would it be?
- How do you think you would feel if you thought you were going to be the first person to meet someone from outer space? What would you say or ask?
- What would you do if you were invisible for a day?
- Why do you think some people don't like animals?

Q: My Little is bullying another kid. How should I deal with this situation?

A: Build on your Little's talents by encouraging him or her to get involved in positive activities. Additionally, you should contact your Match Support Specialist to discuss a strategy for dealing with the issue.

Q: My Little told me that he/she is being bullied. What should I say or do?

A: There are a few things you should do in this situation. Firstly, contact your MSS to discuss possible strategies for helping your Little. You shouldn't blame your Little for the bullying, assume that he or she did something to provoke it, tell them to ignore it, or encourage physical retaliation. Allow him or her to talk with you about their bullying experiences, and try to empathize with them. Explain that bullying is wrong, they are not at fault, and you are glad that he or she had the courage to tell you about it.

Q: My Little often shows some attitude and is becoming very challenging to deal with. How should I deal with his/her behavior?

A: There are many ways in which difficult behaviors can manifest in a child's behavior, and a few tried and true ways to handle them:

Showing Off - Ignore the behavior unless the child can hurt himself or others.

If so, remove them from the situation

Pushing to the limit - Give no warning. When the misbehavior takes place

immediately apply a consequence

Giving up easily - Break up required tasks into shorter assignments.

Reinforce them after every completion

Laziness - Stop prodding, coaxing and threatening. Set up consequences

Dependency - Help the child get started and then have them work on their own.

Shy - Provide short frequent non-threatening ways for children to express themselves

Fearful - Discuss the reasons for the fear and work on a plan to overcome it

Lying- Ask follow-up questions to get more specific details

Q: My Little told me that he/she has been abused or is going through a tough and complicated situation at home or school. How should I respond to him/her and deal with the issue?

A: As a mandatory reporter, you are obligated to report any suspected incidents of child abuse to BBBS. Contact your MSS, who will take care of reporting the incident to DCF. Your role is not to be judgmental of your Little's living situation, but rather to provide friendship and support.

Q: My Little brought up an uncomfortable topic. What is the appropriate way to handle this delicate situation?

A: Certain topics should be discussed only when initiated by the Little. These topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Feel free to seek support and feedback from your Match Support Specialist.

Some **delicate topics** could include: sex, peer pressure, hygiene, behavior, school performance, personal insecurities, stealing, and identity issues (class, culture, gender, etc.).

Issues of concern that may be part of an ongoing problem and should be reported to your MSS include: fighting at school, depression, delinquent behavior, gang affiliation, substance abuse, and verbal harassment.

Crises requiring direct and immediate intervention include: abuse, neglect, chemical dependency, arrests, suicidal behavior, mental illness, and physical harassment. These are mandated by law to be reported. You aren't expected to handle this difficult issue alone - contact your MSS for assistance as soon as you become aware of the situation.

Q: My Little does not seem to be interested in meeting with me anymore. What activities or new things should I try to engage with him/her?

A: Sensing distance from your Little may be a result of his or her insecurities, rather than a direct reflection of their feelings toward you. There are two main kinds of children who give off this sense of disinterestedness: the “I don’t care” child, and the “I won’t show any feeling child.”

The “I Don’t Care” Child

In response to the question, “What would you like to do?” this child’s reply is often “I don’t know” or “whatever you want.” This child is probably lacking in self-confidence to suggest match activities. Responses like this often leave the Big Brother/Big Sister wondering if the child really wants to share time with him/her due to the child’s lack of enthusiasm. Make sure to:

- Take responsibility for planning activities and calling your Little.
- Choose two activity options and help your Little to choose one.
- Sit down together with the Little and brainstorm different match activity ideas and make a list.

The “I Won’t Show Any Feeling” Child

Of course, this child does have feelings but is reluctant to show that he/she really cares whether he/she spends time with you or not. They may have been let down by adults who made promises and didn’t keep them, or denies his/her feelings as a defense mechanism to prevent disappointment. Be patient and remember, this child is in the program because he/she has said that they want to be. You are just the person who can prove to this child that not all adults break their promises.

- Always follow through with plans with your Little unless an emergency comes up.

- Always call and explain to your Little why you have to cancel plans and express your disappointment at not being able to share time with him/her.
- Be sure to reschedule as soon as possible.
- Check in with your Little and ask “how do you feel about this?” or “how did that make you feel?” when your Little shares a significant piece of information with you about school, friends, peers, family, etc.

Q: My Little is having some difficulties associated with going through puberty. How can I best support him/her during this time?

A: When children reach age 10 they are already on the verge of becoming adolescents. Tween boys and girls (pre-adolescents ages 9-12) will experience significant changes as puberty hits. Physical, emotional, and social changes are all part of puberty which makes this developmental time fun, confusing, and even risky. So **the more informed you are the better prepared you will be.**

Physiology - Some of the most important sign of puberty are: the growth of facial and body hair; body odor changes; menstruation; breast growth; change in voice.

Psychology - The social unit becomes very important at this age, and peers and friends become their main focus. Pop culture becomes important, and gender characteristics become more evident during this stage.

Emotions - Due to hormonal changes, tweens can become moody, occasionally showing a preference to be by themselves, or becoming silent or distant.

Sexuality - At this age, tweens may become more curious about sex, and are eager to find out more information.

What tweens need to know -It is important that pre-adolescents seek the right information regarding puberty and sex. Peers may be eager to talk about the topic but they may not have accurate information to share. Thus, talking to trusted adults about sex is a better source of information. Tweens may feel awkward approaching their parents with sex questions, but they may be the best resource. Additionally, hygiene is increasingly important for tweens. At

this age, deodorant use should be part of the daily routine for tween boys and girls. Specifically for tween girls, the use of sanitary pads and bras is important to master.

FAQ's: Community-based

Have questions regarding your role as a Big in your Community-based program?

Check out the list of questions below for some tips on dealing with common match concerns and questions:

Q: I'm having trouble keeping in touch with my Little. How can we keep our match going if he/she doesn't have a phone?

A: If your youth doesn't have a phone or the phone is often disconnected, it will take some extra effort to keep your match going. Please contact your Match Support Specialist (MSS) right away if you begin to have trouble reaching your youth. We're here to help with such challenges. Your MSS will work with you, your youth and your youth's caregiver to develop a plan to overcome this barrier. You can also try setting up your next outing each time you meet. When you drop off your youth, communicate clearly with your youth's caregiver about the time and date of your next activity. Additionally, you can plan to meet regularly on the same day and time each week to limit needed phone contact.

Q: I went to pick up my Little for a scheduled activity and he/she wasn't there. What should I do?

A: It's okay to feel disappointed or frustrated, but try not to take this situation personally. Miscommunication and scheduling problems are common early in a match, and your youth may not be used to scheduled social activities. The best thing to do is contact your Match Support Specialist, who can help you work through it with your youth and your youth's parent. You can reduce the chance of a no-show by using these tips:

- If possible, meet the same day and time each week.
- Set up your next outing each time you meet.
- Be sure to communicate with your youth's parent about your scheduled activity. This increases the likelihood that your youth will be home and helps ensure that a parent will be home when you pick up and drop off your youth.
- Call the day before to confirm plans and call again before you leave to pick up your youth.

Q: I think my Little and I ran out of things to talk about. Any suggestions?

A: One option is using interactive activities such as board games to take the pressure off of the child to make conversation for a while. Conversation tends to come more naturally when you're having fun. Additionally, you can practice your active listening skills and asking open-ended questions.

Active Listening involves paying attention to verbal and non-verbal messages to attempt to understand both the content and emotion of what the other person is saying. The time in which you are actively listening is not the time to be planning or delivering your own message. Active listening encourages honesty, builds respect and affection, and is the first step towards problem solving.

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- Tell me three things you remember about kindergarten.
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Q: Is my service as a Big tax-deductible?

A: Yes! Bigs are allowed to deduct mileage at the charitable rate and the costs of 'entertainment' expenses for the Littles, such as the cost of a movie ticket. The IRS not only allows these types of deductions, but encourages them.

Q: What are BBBS' liability procedures? As a mentor, am I liable for anything or protected in any way?

A: If you're in an accident while driving with your Little, you should report the claim to your insurance carrier. The carrier will then re-route the claim to our insurance. Our coverage that covers the claim is referred to as Non-owned/Hired Auto liability. Some things to keep in mind:

- We do not allow Bigs to transport their Littles under any circumstances unless we have proof of automobile insurance
- It is required by the state of MA that all MA residents owning a vehicle have automobile insurance
- Proof of automobile insurance in MA is listed on all vehicle registrations

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- Be sure to reschedule as soon as possible.
- Check in with your Little and ask "how do you feel about this?" or "how did that make you feel?" when your Little shares a significant piece of information with you about school, friends, peers, family, etc.

Q: My Little often asks me for money or gifts. How should I approach this situation?

A: It's OK to say "no." It can sometimes be difficult to say "no" to our youth, but as a mentor, it is important to feel comfortable setting limits. Children thrive when they know what they can expect and what is expected of them. Some children will test adults in new settings to see how far they can go before they are told "no." Limit testing is common around issues of time and money. Call your Match Support Specialist to explore ways to feel comfortable setting limits with your youth without feeling guilty.

Some other methods to try out:

- As the end of your time together approaches, give your youth reminders. For example, "we have time to play one more game" or "we need to leave in 15 minutes."
- Remind the youth that the focus of Big Brothers Big Sisters is friendship, not money.
- If your match is new, it helps to start out by doing fun activities that don't cost you anything.
- Sit down together with your youth and brainstorm activity ideas you would like to do that don't require spending money.
- Rather than asking your youth "What do you want to do?", provide your youth with a few free or low cost activities to choose from.

Q: What can I do if my Little doesn't want to leave at the end of an activity?

A: Occasionally, children will try to call you all of the time, hang on you, seem to want your attention constantly, and may use negative behavior to get your attention. This child may be starved for attention, or has never been taught boundaries. In these cases, it is very important that you set boundaries as soon as you perceive that the attention seeking behavior is becoming a problem. In order to do this, re-clarify boundaries with your Little. Consistent boundaries are a vital component of successful mentoring relationships, and help create a relationship that is built upon respect. Your Little may decide to test the rules, but should be consistently reminded with both words and actions about these limits. Some examples of how to do this include:

- Pick one day per week and a specific time frame that the child may call you.
- For the very clingy child, you may need to ration your hugs (one at the start of the outing and one at the end) or have your Little ask if it's okay to give you a hug.
- Give the child praise when he/she behaves within the boundaries you have set.

Q: My Little is having some difficulties associated with going through puberty. How can I best support him/her during this time?

A: When children reach age 10 they are already on the verge of becoming adolescents. Tween boys and girls (pre-adolescents ages 9-12) will experience significant changes as puberty hits. Physical, emotional, and social changes are all part of puberty which makes this developmental time fun, confusing, and even risky. So **the more informed you are the better prepared you will be.**

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