

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.



Preparing Volunteers Guide

- 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?

- 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.



Preparing Volunteers Guide

Transition and “Closure”

- Your relationship with your Little may transition to less regular contact because of a change in where you or your Little lives, a change in life circumstances, a feeling that you have successfully taken your Little through a critical stage, a change in school the Little is attending, declining interest as the Little grows older, decreasing times that the Big and Little are meeting, or because of challenges in the match, the match can end its regular pattern of meetings. When one of these circumstances occurs, the Big and/or the Little may decide it is time for a change—for a “transition.” BBBS will “close” the file of your match and will not continue providing regular support to the match. The Big and Little may transition into a pattern of continuing, though less frequent, contact. All BBBS matches “close” when the Little reaches age 18 or graduates from high school.
- 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 to 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.



Big Brothers
Big Sisters.

Preparing Volunteers Guide

Transitioning the Match through Formal Closure

As we described above, there is a Transition stage in a match where the pattern of activities together may become less frequent. For various reasons such as a change in where you or your Little lives, a change in life circumstances, a feeling that you have successfully taken your Little through a critical stage, a change in school the Little is attending, declining interest as the Little grows older, decreasing times that the Big and Little are meeting, or because of challenges in the match, the match can end its regular pattern of meetings. When one of these circumstances occurs, the Big and/or the Little may decide it is time for a change—for a transition.

Hopefully this transition is very positive, for both you and your Little Brother or Sister. 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 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.



Preparing Volunteers Guide

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.

