

PARENT/GUARDIAN ORIENTATION GUIDE

Our vision is that all youth achieve their full potential.

Our mission is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.

We partner with parents/guardians, volunteers and others in the community and hold ourselves accountable for each child in our program achieving:

- Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships
- Avoidance of risky behaviors
- Educational success

This is what we do, this why we do it, and this is why it matters:

2011 percentage of youth maintaining or improving in our key areas:

	Community	Site-Based
Socio-Emotional Competence	97.9%	96.6%
Educational Success	94.5%	95.2%
Avoidance of Risky Behaviors	88.8%	83.4%

About Our Mentoring Programs

Big Brothers Big Sisters offers two primary mentoring programs: community-based, in which a Big and a Little spend time in the community doing activities; and site-based, where the Big visits with the Little at his or her school or another specified facility. You'll discuss the options and the best choices for your schedule and for your Little's needs early in the enrollment process. Here's a brief overview of both.

Community Based Mentoring

Big Brother and Big Sister volunteers provide children and youth – our "Littles" individualized time and attention on a regular basis, typically 2 – 4 times a month, for two to three hours.

During unstructured weekly or bi weekly outings, filled with conversations and shared activities, they develop a relationship that helps youth manage the every-day challenges that are part of "growing up."

During the time with their Big, children gain new skills, explore new interests and test behaviors that expand their experience base beyond their family or neighborhood.

Site-Based Mentoring

Volunteers offer children and youth individualized time and attention on a consistent basis, with the venue being the child's school or other facility rather than out in the community. Teachers identify those children who can most benefit from an extra caring adult in their lives. Volunteers and children meet regularly during the school year – typically each week, utilizing the resources available within the school: computer labs, the library, the gym, a classroom, or the schoolyard. During the summer, they may exchange letters, email messages or phone calls, or attend an agency-sponsored event. Some matches enter a status called School-Based Plus which allows them to meet away from the school campus. And some matches move to become Community-Based Matches so they can meet more regularly.

Whether they play board games, or read the newspaper together, their relationship promotes a positive school experience for the child: good attendance, positive peer and adult relationships, a positive attitude, and academic enrichment. As their friendship evolves over time, volunteers and children discover ways to make school and learning fun. When matches continue from one school year to the next, volunteers experience the satisfaction of watching their Littles achieve success in school.

About Your Role

We need you to be an active Partner. Working together, parents or care givers, volunteers, and BBBS staff members plan activities and opportunities that can have a powerful and positive impact on your child. Here's what you can expect to participate in as a partner in this match:

Talk with Match Support monthly. We will contact you monthly to get your point of view about the match, observations and questions. This monthly contact is required - it allows us to provide support, and offer ideas if problems arise. Note that for safety purposes, we will suspend or terminate any match where consistent conversation is not occurring.

Along with your child, participate in scheduled assessments and other requests, Big Brothers Big Sisters uses assessment data to recommend match direction, identify resources you may need, to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and of course, to ensure safety.

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. We'll talk with you about your observations and conversations during our monthly conversations.

Call us! If you need help locating resources, are moving, have a joy to share, have safety concerns or need to talk about the match, call your Match Support Specialist.

Respect boundaries. We educate volunteers, families and Littles about the importance of focusing on what this match is and what it isn't. For example, we ask all parents to remember that the Big is a volunteer and should not be asked to perform any services for the family, buy clothes or supplies, be asked to take siblings on outings, bring the child home to an empty house, and so on. We'll look more at volunteer roles and responsibilities further on in this guide.

Follow all policies, procedures and ground-rules. Without exception, it is critical to safety and healthy relationship development that you adhere to our rules, as do our volunteers. We will discuss these during your training.

Support your child's mentoring relationship. The time your child spend with his or her Big can be an invaluable experience so sticking to scheduled times, getting to know the Big, talking with your child about the experience and promoting the activities and events offered by the agency are great ways to partner.

About Safety

The safety of your child is our number one priority – no exceptions. 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. Here's how you can further promote safety:

- Participate in planning and approve activities; if you are not comfortable with an activity that your 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 him or her and not leave them alone or with someone else.
- Your child's Big should not use alcohol or other drugs before or during activities with you 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.
- Seatbelts should always be worn.
- Bigs should never drop off your child at a home where no approved adults is present or at a location other than where you specified.
- Showing age-inappropriate videos, misusing social media, pornography or sexual material is not acceptable and is grounds for match termination. Speak with the Big and the Match Support Specialist right away if you see or suspect any of these activities are occurring.

Here are some patterns that you should discuss with your Match Support Specialist:

- 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 such as a volunteer's home, camping setting, overnight visits - instead of more public settings.
- Your child's Big takes an excessive number of pictures or videos of your child.
- The Big becomes involved with your family, buys gifts for your child or provides services beyond the scope of this program.

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.

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.

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.

If at any time you suspect that your child is being harmed, either within our program or elsewhere, please contact Big Brothers Big Sisters' staff.

About Match Activities and Goals



Being in a match is about both having fun and achieving positive outcomes. Your Match Support Specialist will work with you, the Big and your child (teachers, too, if it is a school-based program) to identify goals for the match, which will likely fall into one or more of these three categories of:

- Avoidance of risky behaviors
- Educational Success
- Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships

When you discuss goals with your Match Support Specialist, they will fall into one or more of these categories. These categories represent the most common youth outcomes found as a result of effective mentoring. In general, youth-specific match goals are established to produce one or more of the youth outcomes. The activities your child participates in should support those goals, which can produce the desired outcomes.

About **Our Bigs**

- Based on years of extensive research, Big Brothers Big Sisters requires our volunteers to be capable of the following commitments. Our professional staff work with volunteers to ensure these commitments can be met by providing coaching, training and activities to help you develop in your role as a Big.
- Commit to a minimum of 12 months as a Big
- Commit to spending consistent, significant time with your Little each month
- Follow all agency policies, procedures and ground rules. Because child safety is a top priority, we consider violations of policies, procedures, and ground rules to be grounds for match suspension or termination.
- Maintain regular communication with Match Support staff, including returning all calls and emails. Failure to maintain contact may result in closure of the match.
- Participate in required surveys and assessments related to the match relationship and youth outcomes.
- Complete assigned training.

Research tells us that Littles achieve greater results when their Big...

- Emphasizes friendship over changing the behavior.
- Is not authoritarian.
- Decides activities together with Littles.
- Is consistent & dependable.
- Has a realistic expectation about the Little.
- Is patient.
- Focuses on having fun.
- Sets boundaries and limits.
- Acknowledges that positive impact on the child comes after the relationship is built.
- Puts a child's safety and well-being first.
- Helps form goals.

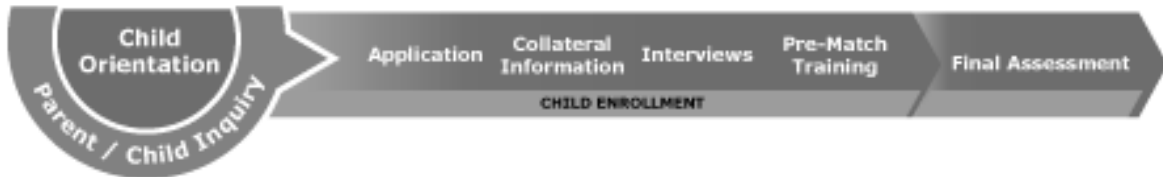
And we know what a Big is **not**:

ATM
Childcare provider
Provider of professional services
Tutor

We will work with you to ensure healthy boundaries are established.

About the **Enrollment Process**

Potential Littles, along with their families, are screened to ensure that our mentoring programs are the best fit for the Littles needs. The process for children and their families looks like this:



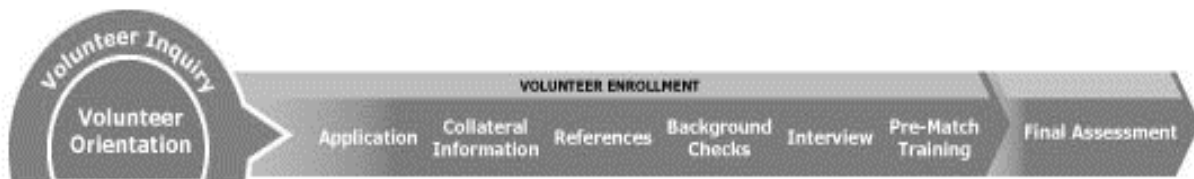
Enrollment Steps

1. Inquire about being a Little
2. Complete the application
3. A member of the staff will contact you to schedule an interview
4. Interview with us
5. Complete Pre-Match Training

Leading the enrollment and matching processes are professionals whose job it is to make the best possible match. When a match is made, a Match Support Specialist oversees the relationship by providing coaching, ensuring safety, assisting in goal-oriented activities, referring services, and helping you, the Little and his/her family with needs. It is therefore critical for all match parties to treat contact by the Match Support Specialist as a serious component of match development. Lack of response to Match Support's contacts is grounds for match suspension or termination, which can have detrimental impact on the Little.

Later in the process, you'll receive training and instruction on our policies, procedures and guidelines – all of which are designed to help you have the most positive impact on a Little as possible.

The enrollment process for our volunteers is similar to the process you will complete and looks like this:



In addition, potential volunteers also go through intensive background checks, home visits, interviews with partner/spouse and others in the household.

These initial enrollment processes, along with Match Support, policy and procedure adherence by all, are critical components of our safety system.

Big Brothers Big Sisters retains the right to accept or deny participants or close a match at any time.

About **Expectations**

If your child is approved and enrolled in the program, he or she will be placed on the Big Brothers Big Sisters waiting list. Once we have a volunteer to match your child with, you can expect a structured, professional process. Here's how it works:

1. Match Proposal: a potential volunteer will be proposed to you and your child
2. Match Introduction Meeting: Match Support Specialist, volunteer, child and parent are introduced
3. Communication: Match Support Staff are in contact with all match parties
4. Training: ongoing training and resources will be provided as needed
5. Match activities and events: info on monthly activities will be provided to Bigs by email
6. Youth Development Plan: volunteers will be provided with goals to work with Little
7. Annual survey completion: to evaluate match needs and accomplishments

About **Match Closure**

We know from research on mentoring that when relationship closure is unplanned, abrupt, premature, or handled without care and communication, Littles can be harmed. In addition, mentors may also be left feeling guilty, sad, or lacking closure.

It may seem odd or even pessimistic to discuss this stage when your child is contemplating or entering a mentoring relationship. However, research shows that when mentors, parents and children are trained in how to handle match closure well and, in partnership with Match Support staff, actively plan for the end of their match, it can be a positive process that allows for reflection and personal growth for both the mentor and the Little.

At the time of closure, Big Brothers Big Sisters will discuss with you, your Little, and the Big (and teacher) about the best plan for closing your match relationship with the organization. When a match is closed, Big Brothers Big Sisters officially closes the file and does not continue to provide professional support or guidance to the previously matched parties. At that point, the match is no longer considered an "active" match, or part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. This means that Big Brothers Big Sisters is no longer responsible for or involved in the relationship.

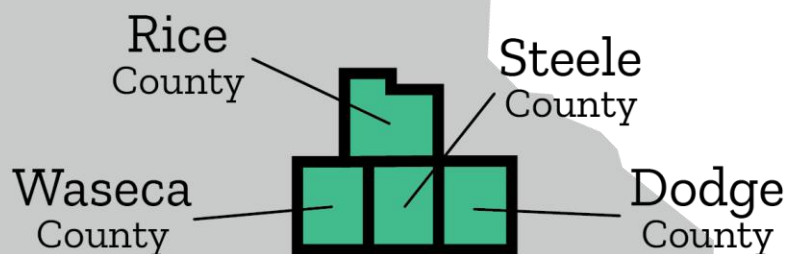
By this time, your child and his or her Big have most likely invested a lot into each other and the relationship. During the closure process, it is important that Bigs and Littles celebrate their time together and set plans for the future

When your match closes, talk to your Match Support staff about ways in which you can stay involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters. This may include your child being matched again, but there are many other ways in which you can be involved with the agency. You and your Match Support staff should talk about the best options for you.

About Our Families

WHO WE SERVE:

- Our 4-county community
- Children ages 5 - 14
- Any child who wants an extra friend
- 67% are eligible for free/reduced lunch
- 55% are from a non two-parent family
- 22% have an incarcerated family member



About Our **Non-Discrimination Policies:**

Children are not excluded based on race, religion, national origin, color, gender, marital status of parent, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status or disability.

Volunteer Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Board Members, and Agency Staff as Volunteer Bigs are not excluded on the basis of race, religion, national origin, color, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, or disability.

Agency Staff CONTACT INFO

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More information & resources for parents / guardians can be found on our website, www.bbbsouthernmn.org, under *Parents*. Or go directly to:

www.bbbsouthernmn.org/parents/resources

www.bbbsouthernmn.org



Thank you for partnering with Big Brothers Big Sisters to make a difference in your child's life!