Big Brothers Big Sisters®
OF ITHACA & TOMPKINS COUNTY

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM POLICIES

A Program of the Ithaca Youth Bureau
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www.bbbsithaca.org

MISSION AND VISION

You have a big opportunity in front of you—to not only impact a child's life today, but to transform their potential for tomorrow.

MISSION

Create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.

VISION

All youth achieve their full potential, including greater confidence and better relationships.

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

Our organization is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of every child in our program. We work closely with parents, volunteers, and other community members to achieve this goal. We are committed to the following:

- Pairing children with a stable and consistent mentor for at least 1 year
- Providing opportunities for youth to have new educational and recreational activities with their mentor
- Having staff support available for volunteers and families throughout the duration of the match
- Fostering a sense of belonging in a safe and welcoming Big Brothers Big Sisters community

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Big Brothers Big Sisters. OF ITHACA & TOMPKINS COUNTY

Ithaca Youth Bureau

DEFENDING POTENTIAL

EXPECTATIONS FOR BIGS

As a reminder, during the enrollment process you signed a Volunteer Match Agreement stating that you understand and agree to the following:

- You commit to remain in contact with your Little for **one full year** from the date of your introduction meeting (for undergraduate students the time commitment is 3 full semesters)
- You commit to meeting weekly with your Little for about **2 hours.**
- You will communicate with the parent/guardian to arrange weekly meetings.
- You will only miss a meeting with your Little Brother/Sister for unavoidable reasons.
- If you *must* miss a meeting, you will let the parent/guardian know as soon as possible *and* reschedule the missed meeting.
- You must not stop meeting with your Little Brother/Sister until you've created a closure plan with your Match Support Specialist, or are asked to stop meeting by BBBS Staff.
- You will participate in mandatory monthly meetings with your Match Support Specialist.
- You are the only person authorized to drive your Little and are responsible for having liability insurace on any vehicle used to transport your Little.
- You are responsible for the safety of your Little Brother/Sister during your time together and you agree to follow all rules and policies outlined in the Pre-Match Training.

PROGRAM POLICIES

PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR:

We want our Bigs to create a positive environment where misbehavior is not an issue. There may be some initial testing of boundaries in the beginning of your relationship, but most negative behavior can be avoided by following a few guidelines.

- Stay focused on your Little. Avoid distractions. Listen and engage actively in conversations.
- Keep yourselves busy. Have a plan and a back up plan. Collect activity ideas together for future use.
- Recognize and acknowledge their good behavior when you see it. Offer genuine and specific recognition.

When negative behavior occurs:

- Avoid taking it personally. Instead, treat it as a teachable moment.
- Provide advice, suggestions, and guidance. Do not punish or discipline.
- Avoid long lectures. Address issues with short discussions that address the behavior, not the child.
- Talk with your Match Support Specialist and/or the parent/guardian for guidance if behavior becomes a problem.

Remember, negative behavior is often a sign that the child needs you in their life more than ever. Seek assistance, try a different solution, but don't give up on your Little.

PROGRAM POLICIES

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES:

Staying in touch with your Little's parent/caregiver is very important to the success of match relationships. Please observe the following rules and guidelines when communicating with your Little's family.

- Always keep your Match ID card with you on match outings and save all contact information in your cell phone as well.
- Get to know the parent/guardians' preferred methods of communication and weekly availability. Adapt to their communication needs whenever possible.
- Ask your Little's parent/guardian when works best for them to communicate according to their schedule (i.e. can they communicate during their work hours etc.)
- Always keep the parent/guardian in the loop regarding activity plans, even if you communicate directly with your Little on their own device. Consider creating a "group chat" with your Little and their parent/guardian. This will ensure that you have permission for each activity, as well as ensuring that your Little doesn't miss the meeting due to scheduling conflicts.
- You should be as consistent as possible every week with your match outings, but if you must miss one:
  - Do so for only valid, unavoidable reasons.
  - Give the family as much notice as possible.
  - Find ways to make up the time/reschedule, rather than just canceling.

PROGRAM POLICIES

COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR MATCH SUPPORT SPECIALIST:

Once your match is confirmed, you will be assigned a Match Support Specialist (MSS) from our staff. The MSS serves as your agency liaison and will be your primary contact with BBBS throughout your entire match. As a Big in our program, you are required to maintain communication with your MSS. **A lack of communication with your Match Support Specialist may result in your match being ended.**

Your Match Support Specialist must meet with you every month for around 30 minutes to discuss the match. Please be aware of the following rules regarding these official monthly meetings:

- Your MSS will contact you each month to schedule your meetings. Please respond to them in a timely manner and be as flexible as possible with your schedule.
- Official monthly check-ins must happen in person, over the phone, or over a virtual platform such as Zoom.
- Occasionally your MSS will ask you to complete a survey regarding the development of your match. Please fill these surveys out accurately and honestly in a timely manner.

The following are topics that your Match Support Specialist will cover at your meetings, and things we hope you'll bring up if necessary:

- Details regarding activities you and your Little have done over the previous month.
- Future activity ideas and possible goals for your match.
- Celebrating milestones and accomplishments of the match.
- Providing assistance with family communication or scheduling concerns.
- Changes in your Little's development or behavior.
- All aspects of child and match safety.

In addition to the official, monthly meetings, your Match Support Specialist is available every day to provide assistance and support. Please contact them any time with emergencies, and at any reasonable time with non-emergencies. Daily communication with your MSS can take any form, including texting, email. Match Support will also provide:

- Weekly emails with activity ideas, conversation prompts and event information.
- Invitations to monthly "Match Events" designed by staff and offered to all matches.

PROGRAM POLICIES

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:

Volunteers must be prepared to respond if their Little is injured or becomes seriously ill during a match outing. Please follow these rules and procedures in case of an emergency.

- Always have your match ID card with you on outings, and all contact info saved in your phone.
- Always ensure the child has any necessary medical devices, such as their inhaler or epi-pen.

If an emergency situation where professional medical treatment is necessary, you must first decide if an ambulance is needed. To make that decision, use the following questions to help you quickly decide:

1. **Is the injury or illness *CLEARLY* life threatening?**
   If yes, call the ambulance. Follow process below
   If no, ask question 2.

2. **Does the situation need a doctor but CLEARLY *NOT* need an ambulance? (Ex: broken finger)**
   If yes, do not call ambulance. Follow process below.
   If no, ask question 3.

3. **Is this an unclear situation where you have doubts and are unsure about what to do?**
   If yes, call the ambulance just to be safe.

If you call the ambulance, follow this process:

- Call the ambulance and give medical personnel all relevant information.
- Inform the parent/guardian immediately AFTER calling the ambulance.
- Stay with the child until the parent/guardian or the MSS arrive to relieve you of duty.
- Inform your MSS of what happened as soon as possible and provide all the details.
- When possible, obtain names and contact information for anyone who witnessed the accident.

If you DO NOT call the ambulance, follow this process:

- Contact the parent/guardian immediately and let them decide what to do.
- If they cannot be reached, take the child to the emergency room yourself if possible.
  (If you cannot reach the parents and cannot transport the child yourself, call an ambulance)
- Stay with the child until the parent/guardian or the MSS arrive to relieve you of duty.
- Inform your MSS of what happened as soon as possible and provide all the details.
- When possible, obtain names and contact information for anyone who witnessed the accident.

PROGRAM POLICIES

MEDICAL NON-EMERGENCIES:

During match outings, sometimes children are hurt in minor ways, such as scrapes, small cuts, bruises or splinters. Though we do not need you to provide full reports and witnesses for minor medical issues, you should adhere to the following rules and guidelines:

- Report all injuries, no matter how minor, to parents when you drop your Little off at home. This will allow them to provide further care if necessary.
- You are permitted to provide basic first aid to a Little who has a minor injury. Any volunteer with current, valid certification in first aid or CPR is permitted to provide any care that they are certified to provide. Volunteers without such licensure should never do more than the cleaning of a small wound, and/or the application of a band aid or icepack.
- If you are not comfortable providing basic first aid, please bring the child home immediately to receive care from their parent/guardian.
- If you provide any type of first aid, please use universal safety precautions when touching an injured child. Wear gloves and avoid contact with any bodily fluids. Our staff can provide gloves and band aids to any Bigs who request them.
- Volunteers are not permitted to provide medication of any kind to a child unless it is a life saving measure, such as an epi-pen or asthma inhaler.

PROGRAM POLICIES

HOME VISITS:

The following policies are for volunteers who live by themselves or with a small number of people. Volunteers who live in dormitories, sororities, fraternities or co-ops will need to consult with their MSS to make a specialized plan for any home visits that may occur.

THE LITTLE MAY VISIT THE BIG'S HOME ONLY IF:

- The 3 month waiting period has passed.
- Your Match Support Specialist has conducted a home assessment visit and given general permission for home visits.
- You have obtained PRIOR verbal permission from the parent/guardian for EACH visit.
- The match has a specific, planned activity in mind for the meeting
- The match spends time only in the common areas of the home (Kitchen, living room, etc.)
- The home visits occur no more than once per month, unless written permission has been given under unique circumstances.

REMEMBER:

- If you have firearms, all weapons and ammunition must either be locked away or be stored in a totally inaccessible location where match activities do not take place.
- Overnight visits are not allowed.

PROGRAM POLICIES

CAR SAFETY:

- You are the only person permitted to drive your Little in your car. No one else may be behind the wheel during your match outings.
- Current proof of insurance must be provided for all vehicles used to transport Littles.
- All Bigs must carry their own NYS compliant car insurance policy. If at any time your vehicle is not insured, you should not use it to transport your Little. Please provide updated insurance info to your MSS.
- Unless alternative arrangements are discussed and made with the parent/guardian and the MSS, children should sit in the following locations in your vehicle:
  - 13 years of age an up: Any seat other than driver
  - Ages 8-12: Back seat
  - Ages 7 and under: Back seat with booster seat (Booster seats will be made available by either the parent or BBBS)
- Bigs must observe all traffic laws and strictly adhere to all speed limits.
- Bigs should not use their cell phones at all while driving. Even the GPS should be set while pulled over.
- Littles and Bigs must be properly restrained by seat belts at all times.
- Public transportation may be used with parental permission. This includes: Buses, taxis, Uber, Lyft.
- Motorcycles and Mopeds may not be used to transport Littles.
- The match may only travel outside Tompkins County after a 3 month waiting period, and only with prior, written permission from the parent/guardian.

PROGRAM POLICIES

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE POLICY:

Most children are already getting plenty of computer, social media and gaming time in their lives. Many parents/guardians would like their children to experience screen-free activities with their Bigs. Even so, with parental permission our matches may use the internet together, as long as the following rules are followed:

INTERNET AND GAMING:

- You must learn the parent/guardians' rules regarding internet use before using a computer with your Little.
- You must get verbal permission from parents before visiting any new or unknown websites suggested by the Little.
- You are responsible for ensuring that no inappropriate content is viewed by your Little while online.
- The computer/gaming console should never become the default activity for any match. Computers should be used only when the match is doing a specific, planned activity.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE:

- Do NOT introduce your Little to any social media platform for the first time. It is up to parents if and when Littles begin using social media.
- If you and your Little want to connect on a social media platform that the Little is already using, you must get verbal permission from both the parent/guardian and your MSS *BEFORE* you connect on any platforms.
- Discuss with the parent/guardian their child's knowledge of social media and what is allowed.

POSTING PHOTOS:

You may take photos of your Little unless otherwise informed by parents or staff. If you would like to ***post*** a photo that includes your Little on any website or social media platform, you ***must*** do the following ***BEFORE*** posting anything:

- Get verbal permission from both the parent/guardian and your Match Support Specialist.
- Send a copy of the photo to your Match Support Specialist.
- Verify that the photo does not reveal any confidential information, such as the Little's home.

PROGRAM POLICIES

SPENDING MONEY:

The quality of the time you invest with your Little is much more important than the amount of money you spend. It is vital that you spend the majority of your match time doing free and inexpensive activities that promote conversation, fun, exploration, and friendship. Although you are *permitted* to spend money, please adhere to the following when considering any spending:

- Littles are not permitted to ask Bigs for money, or to buy them things. If they do so, you should remind them of this BBBS rule that you both most follow.
- Parents/guardians are not required, or encouraged, to provide money for activities, but may be able to in some cases. If a parent sends their child with money while on an outing with you, be sure to check with them about their rules regarding its use.
- If you choose to spend money on match outings, please do so:
  - Sparingly. Make the majority of your outings spending-free.
  - On special occasions such as a birthday or match anniversary.
  - In a way that provides an experience such as a museum or an enriching activity.

Remember that the first few months of your relationship establishes match expectations. Engaging in free or low cost activities in the early part of your match will help set you up for success.

BBBS does the following to help our Bigs not spend money:

- Free passes to the Sciencenter, The Museum of the Earth and the Cayuga Nature Center.
- Free membership to the YMCA for all matches.
- Free and/or low cost ice skating, roller skating and swimming at Cass Park Pool.
- Free admission at Alex Haley Pool.
- Access to spaces, games, art materials and more at the Ithaca Youth Bureau.
- Access to an archive of all weekly activity emails on our website.

Please check in with your Match Support Specialist for more information.

PROGRAM POLICIES

DRUG, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO USE:

- You may not consume drugs, alcohol or tobacco products while on a match outing with your Little under any circumstances.
- You may not consume drugs or alcohol on the day of your match outing, prior to meeting with your Little.
- You must not have illegal drugs in your residence or vehicle. Bigs must ensure that all *legal* drugs, alcohol and tobacco products are stored in a secure and inaccessible location during any match activity involving their homes or vehicles
- Bigs who smoke, chew, or vape tobacco products should encourage healthy behaviors by concealing your tobacco from your Littles whenever possible.
- Bigs who use edible forms of marijuana should also be mindful that many THC products have the appearance of candy and may look appealing to children. Extra caution should be used when storing such products, so that they will not be encountered by your Little.

PROGRAM POLICIES

CONFIDENTIALITY:

- You must respect the confidentiality and privacy of your Little and their family.
- You will be speaking with BBBS Staff members about the development of the relationship and about the safety of your Little.

PROGRAM POLICIES

MATCH SAFETY:

As a volunteer with our agency, you assume a moral and legal responsibility to ensure your Little's safety during your match meetings together. In addition to the other rules and regulations throughout this training, please also adhere to the following rules when choosing activities with your Little:

- When possible, choose activities that are obviously known to be safe for children.
- Do not allow yourself to be talked into activities that are clearly unsafe.
- Always get *PRIOR* permission from the parent/guardian and your MSS for any activities that include some risk, or if the safety level is in doubt. In some cases, your MSS may request written permission forms, discuss a safety plan with the match, or say "no" to certain activity ideas.
- Get to know your Little's family's safety rules and treat them just like they are agency policy. (If BBBS and parental rules differ, follow whoever's rules are stricter/safer in each situation)
- Do not engage in any activities involving firearms or other weapons.
- If your Little is riding anything with wheels, they must wear a helmet. (Ex. bikes, scooters, etc)
- View only age appropriate movies, television and video games with your Little. (Follow ratings)
- **You may only swim where there are certified lifeguards on duty unless you have obtained PRIOR, WRITTEN permission from both the parent/guardian and your MSS. Matches are never permitted to swim in any gorges or other illegal and dangerous locations.** Be sure to get to know your Little's swimming abilities before going on any water-based outings. These swimming rules also apply to other water-based activities, such as sailing, kayaking, paddle boarding.
- Overnight visits of any kind are not permitted.
- Matches may travel outside of Tompkins County with prior, written permission from the parent/guardian, and only after a 3-month waiting period.
- Matches may participate in activities at the volunteer's home with parental permission, but only after a 3-month waiting period, and after your MSS conducts a home assessment.
- Bigs must be with their Littles at all times during match outings. Under no circumstances should a child be left in the care of any other person, even a trusted person.
- **COVID SAFETY:** Although our BBBS Covid guidelines have loosened, it is important to remember that the family or the Big may still feel more comfortable adhering to a strict set of safety guidelines. All Bigs should check in with their Little's family and discuss any precautions that the family or Big may want the match to continue to take.

PROGRAM POLICIES

MATCH CLOSURE/ENDING THE MATCH:

- You must commit to be being matched with your Little for at least one full year from the date you meet them. Some volunteers choose to stay longer, but it is not an obligation.
- If at any time you decide that the match needs to end, please contact your ***Match Support Specialist first*** (before talking to the Little or the parent) in order to discuss things before any action is taken. Any time a match ends, it's very important that our agency be closely involved so that we can help to facilitate a positive transition for the Little.
- When it is time for the match to end, we will work with everyone to facilitate the closure process and make sure that the match ends positively.
- Some families and Bigs choose to stay in contact even after the official BBBS match is over. That decision is up to you and the family, but once the BBBS match has been officially closed, our program will no longer be providing support visits and will no longer assume any responsibility for the match.