



### Successful Bigs also:

Accept their Little or their Little's family as they are. It's not about changing what is already there, but about impacting their lives in a positive way.

Don't become frustrated when their Little doesn't call.

They stick to their schedules. Missed and cancelled outings are disappointing, so they make sure their meetings are consistent.

They put friendships first. Improved grades, attitudes and behaviors will come with time.

### Learning from each other

Littles may come from living situations, family backgrounds, religions and cultures different from that of their Bigs'. Take turns learning about each other's family and/or cultural traditions, and learn about your Little's life, environment, and perspective on the world from the start. Remember: as a friend, you *add* to your Little's values—you don't change the ones he or she has.

Some Littles have experienced trauma or loss in their lives. Young people (and adults, too!) don't always have the words to express how they feel, or even know why they feel the way they do. Understand that your Little may not see the world the same way, or be as carefree, as other children you know. Sometimes kids do or say the opposite of what they really mean because they're confused or scared of getting hurt. Your match support team is there to help with situations like this, and to give sound advice on what you're experiencing.

Keep an open mind. You may not agree with the choices your Little or her/his family is making, but your role is to listen and be a friend. By example, your Little will learn that there are many positive ways to approach situations, and make choices in life.

Children are strongly affected by the behavior and values of the people they admire and look up to. By example as a responsible caring adult, you add choices to your Little's future, and make a positive impact in his or her life.



**Big Brothers Big Sisters**

*Little Moments. Big Magic.™*

**Our Most  
Frequently Asked  
Questions about  
Being a Big**

# Big Facts

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ithaca & Tompkins County

Welcome to Big Brothers Big Sisters, where little moments truly can make big magic. Big Brothers Big Sisters is about one-to-one friendships, but is made up of a community of caring, giving people hundreds of thousands strong, changing what it means for children to grow up in America—you really don't have to change your life to impact theirs.

## A 'Little' Background Info...

### *How will I be matched with child?*

The application and interview process helps us to get to know your preferences and learn about the situation best suited for you. You also get to know us and learn what to expect. In making your match, we take into account your personality, likes, dislikes, age preferences, background, and location. And the final decision about a match is always yours.

### *How do children come into the program?*

Children and parents may hear about BBBS from a teacher, a counselor, their church, a friend who has a Big, commercials, etc. All children and their parents choose to be part of our program.

### *Who are the children are in the program?*

Our Littles come from various types of home environments and family structures, different socio-economic levels, ethnic backgrounds, and neighborhoods and schools across our entire community. Their backgrounds and personalities are unique. They all have a need for friendship with a caring adult.

## Once You are Matched...

### *When can I see my Little?*

You and your Little—and his or her parent—decide the best times for your match to meet. Keep a consistent schedule, and see each other at least twice a month to establish a genuine relationship and comfort level. The length of outings will depend on the comfort level Big, Little, and parent. If your Little is young, a shorter outing will be best to start.



## How much money should I spend?

Seek out free or low-cost, simple activities, especially in the beginning. Our agency offers group activities that are a great way to meet other Bigs and Littles! We also offer a monthly e-bulletin with information about free or inexpensive activities in the area. You will also receive emails about opportunities for free tickets for your match to attend a variety of cultural and sports activities. Buying gifts for your Little will actually stifle your friendship, because your Little will have the wrong expectations of the relationship.

## What are some good ideas for outings with my Little?

Friendships develop through shared experiences. Start your match with something simple and casual where you can learn about each other. Play catch in the park, bake cookies, bowl, have a picnic lunch, take a bike ride, or visit the library. *This will set your Little's expectations for the time you share.* Save special outings or events (which you both agree on) until after you have built an understanding and your friendship is solid. Your match support team can also give many suggestions.

## What kinds of activities should I avoid at first?

**Commercial “Fun” Stores:** Gameworks, Boomers, Chuck-e-Cheese—these can be really fun places, but costly. Save these for special occasions only, such as birthday, good grades, etc., and only if *you* choose this as an okay activity.

**Movies:** It's important to communicate while engaged in a common interest with your Little: hard to do at a movie. When you do go, be sure to share your reactions and thoughts of what you saw after the show.

**Shopping:** Avoid this as an activity unless you both agree on the purpose and goal, such as how make a sound purchase for a Mother's Day gift or spend an allowance wisely. If you choose to shop, set limits as you would with any child who, confronted with enticing displays, wants something he/she cannot have.

## Can I bring my partner/friend/family member on outings?

It's important to spend one-on-one time hanging out with your Little getting to know each other. It is good for your Little to get to know the people who are important to you—this can be a great way for you to model appropriate friendship/relationship skills, but spend at least half of your outings in one-on-one activities so your Little benefits from your special attention.

## What is the Match Support Team?

The Match Support Team is a group of specialists who can help you develop your friendship, address any questions, concerns, or problems, and give you guidance throughout your match. The team can help you understand what is happening in your friendship and flag problems before they start. They can also be a helpful link to resources. Contact information for the Match Support Team is on the back of this flyer.



## Helpful Hints for a Great Match...

### What if my Little doesn't talk to me at first?

Some children aren't used to having an attentive listener and are uncomfortable talking. Here are some pointers...

**Use humor to get conversations going;** there's nothing like a good laugh to break the ice. (Your match support team can give you great tips on this.)

**Keep intermittent eye contact;** look at your Little when he/she is talking, and smile when it's appropriate.

**When your Little is talking,** make sure he or she knows you are not distracted, and be an active listener: *Tell me more about that, What happened next?, How did you feel?* (Not: *Why did/didn't/won't you?, How could you?*, etc.)

**Be aware of your body language** and facial expressions...avoid folding your arms, rolling your eyes, frowning, or otherwise showing disapproval.

### A few things that effective Bigs tend to do consistently:

**They understand that their role is to be a friend.** Our Littles already have caring teachers and parental figures in their lives. Effective Bigs add the simple but powerful element of someone who freely chooses to be part of a child's life, someone who likes and respects him/her, and believes in his/her potential.

**They listen—really listen.** They actively try to get their Little to talk about what is important to him/her; they remember what their Littles have said or shared, and follow up with interest.

**They keep their promises.** They make a commitment to their Little and show the child that they think their time together is valuable and important.

**They understand that this relationship can often look and feel one-sided.** Sometimes it may feel like you are making all of the plans and all of the calls. That's okay. Consistently initiating contact and making plans will help develop trust and show your Little that you care about him/her.

**They involve their Littles in deciding what to do with their time together.** These Bigs take time to see what kinds of things their Littles like to do. Again, it makes the Little feel like you really care about him/her.

**They believe in magic.** When having fun is a priority, you both get to explore new ideas and share experiences neither of you might otherwise have—that's where the magic is.

**They keep in contact with their Match Support Team.** Successful Bigs recognize that sometimes they don't have all of the answers. Your support team will help you understand what is happening in your relationship so that you can prevent problems from developing down the road.