

# **High School Bigs Volunteer Handbook**



## **Big Brothers Big Sisters** of Yellowstone County

*A partnership between Billings and Laurel School Districts  
and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County*

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# Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County

**Mission:** Our mission is to provide children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported 1-to-1 relationships that change lives for the better, forever.

**Vision:** A successful mentoring relationship for all children who need and want one, contributing to brighter futures, better schools, and stronger communities for all.

## Support from Agency Staff

The staff at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone county is here to give you support, and to help you to be an effective mentor. Please communicate with us any problems or concerns you may have:

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## Our Mentoring Programs

School-Based Mentoring: Our School-Based Program matches high school juniors and seniors with preschool, elementary and middle school students. The high school students receive a general elective credit for participation in the program and are matched with two littles. Bigs visit each little twice a week and come to the BBBS office once a week for training. Bigs help littles with school work, go to recess, play games and make a BIG difference!

The impact on Littles and Bigs is profound and measurable. Research has shown that Littles improve in the areas of academics, self-confidence, familial relationships and ability to avoid delinquency.

Community Based Mentoring: The Community program matches adults over the age of 18 with children from age 5 through 15. Our coordinators interview all parties—the child’s parents or guardian, the child and the volunteer. When an appropriate match is identified, the parent and volunteer meet with BBBS staff to make sure the adults are comfortable with each other. After that, if all parties agree, the match is made and the mentoring begins. Bigs and Littles spend an hour or two together a week doing things they both enjoy.

Lunch Buddies Program: This mentoring program matches adults from the community with elementary school students. Lunch buddies are matched with one student and spend an hour a week helping them with homework, playing at recess and more importantly being a friend.

Buddies are men and women who are 18 and older and who have demonstrated, by way of a complete background check, personal references, and an in-depth interview, that they can be effective site-based mentors.

Bears and Cubs Program: This program is new to BBBS. The program matches college students from Rocky with students at Highland Elementary. The “bears” commit to at least one hour a week to visiting their “cub” at the school. Visits are restricted to school grounds and matches spend time doing homework, playing board games and getting to know one another.

## **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

# of Yellowstone County Rules & Guidelines

## HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PROGRAM

### **Acknowledgement of Obligation**

I agree to take an active part in the High School Bigs Program, and visit my assigned Little(s) as scheduled. I understand that this will not obligate me financially or legally.

I further acknowledge and agree that Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County may, without incurring liability of any nature whatsoever to the undersigned, refer to the proper authorities any deviant behaviors relating to illegal drugs or sexual or other misconduct on my part.

I understand it may be necessary for Big Brother Big Sisters of Yellowstone County to investigate my background regarding character references, employment records, and criminal history (upon turning 18 years of age.) I give my consent for any agency to release my records and to furnish it to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County.

### **Agreement to Protect Confidentiality**

I agree to keep information discussed with me regarding a potential Little confidential. I will not discuss this information with any person other than the assigned Big Brothers Big Sisters staff, or the assigned counselors at my school. I will further protect my Little's confidentiality by not sharing names and other specific details with anyone but Big Brothers Big Sisters staff.

### **Consent to Share Matching Information**

I understand information about me will be prepared by the staff of Big Brothers Big Sisters and I consent to its disclosure to a potential Little. This may include personnel at the Little's school.

### **Plagiarism Policy**

\*Taken from the Student Handbook:

Cheating on tests, copying another student's composition or homework, and plagiarizing the ideas, words, or writings of another is forbidden. Students who are determined to have cheated or plagiarized will be given a zero on the assignment or test and a Disciplinary Referral shall be submitted to my school's Administration. (Parent notification/conference, 0 on assignment, substitute assignment, loss of credit and removal from class)

The Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring class will adhere to this policy for all students in all cases. I have read and understood the above and will follow its guidelines.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PROGRAM

## Volunteer Ground Rules

1. I understand that seeing my Little Brother/Sister consistently is one of the most important things I can do as a mentor; therefore I will see my Little twice weekly, or as arranged by the Big Brothers Big Sisters staff.
2. I understand that all contact with my Littles is restricted to school grounds. I will not exchange phone numbers, email addresses, or other contact information with my Littles. I will not “friend” my Little on Facebook or any other social networking site.
3. I understand that the relationship between my Little and me is primarily a one-to-one relationship. I am not there to help the entire class or run errands for the teacher.
4. I will not try to convert my Little to my religious or political views.
5. I will refrain from using offensive language and gestures.
6. I will adhere to school procedures for match visits, including verifying my attendance on match visit days by signing in at my Little’s school.
7. If I am unable to meet with my Little I will notify the Little’s school **and** Big Brothers Big Sisters.
8. I will follow all the rules and policies of the Littles’ schools while I am on their campus.
9. I will not use my cell phone at my Littles’ school.
10. I understand that I might learn personal information about my Little and his/her family members, and I will keep that information confidential.
11. I will maintain regular contact with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program Supervisor by attending all classes and responding to calls, letters, and texts. If I fail to respond in a timely manner, my grade may suffer and ultimately, I may be dropped from the class with a “0”.
12. If a problem arises in my match relationship, if I have questions or concerns, or If my Little tells me something that makes me uncomfortable, I will notify the BBBS agency immediately, by calling 248-2229 or 855-0346 (Billings program) and 690-9956 or 855-7601(Laurel program).
13. If my address, email address, or telephone number changes, I will notify BBBS right away.
14. I will complete all required paperwork and match support.
15. Gift giving is discouraged. If I want to bring my little something at school I will ask BBBS **first**.
16. I understand that failure to adhere to BBBS of Yellowstone County standards, requirements, and expectations may result in match closure and termination of my participation in this program.

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Signature of Student

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Date

# Mentoring Expectations

## **Attendance:**

It is important for you to visit your Littles! If you'll be absent from the Wednesday class or mentoring, you must call our office, and your Little's school for that day, or it is an unexcused absence. Attendance is the most important part of your grade. Part of this grade is participating in class on Wednesdays by sharing your experience, taking quizzes, participating in games, and having match support meetings with a staff member (to be explained). Unexcused absences and frequent tardiness will result in a lower grade. If the student anticipates an absence, such as a school-related activity or doctor's appointment, he/she must contact the Little's school and BBBS in advance.

## **Dress code:**

Students are expected to adhere to the Littles' school's dress codes. The following items are considered inappropriate and should not be worn to the Littles' schools:

1. Any item that advertises tobacco products, alcohol, drugs, sex, violence, gang affiliation, etc.
2. Any shorts with an inseam of less than four inches, as well as skirts that are shorter than mid-thigh.
3. Any tops with exposed midriffs or that are extremely tight or low-cut. Tank tops are allowed only if the strap of the top is wider than three fingers (usually the school principal's fingers). If the tank tops have smaller straps, an appropriate under/over shirt must be worn.
4. Any clothing that exposes undergarments.
5. Hats must be removed upon entering the Littles' schools.

## **Student Behavior:**

Students are expected to follow all elementary/middle school rules and staff directions:

1. Swearing, teasing, offensive language (threats, racist comments, derogatory slang, disrespectful remarks, and gestures) are prohibited.
2. Feet, hands, and objects are to be kept to one's self.
3. Wrestling, tackle football, tickling, lap-sitting and other contact activities are not allowed.
4. Students will not engage in any behavior resulting in destruction of property or the endangerment of others.
5. If disciplinary issues arise, refer to the classroom teacher immediately.
6. Gum is not allowed at Littles' schools.
7. Report any suspected abuse **immediately** to BBBS.

# **MENTORING 101**

# For New Bigs

Here you are, a brand new Big. You're excited, energized, and raring to go but also a little nervous and unsure about what to do and what to expect. Most of this book is about being a Big after you and your Little have gotten to know each other, at least for a short time. So we figured you could use a little advice about getting started on the wonderful journey you've just begun.

First of all, remember that there's something unusual happening. Two people are being connected with the expectation that they'll like each other, be compatible, and want to spend time together. It's not the way people normally meet, especially an adult and a child. If it makes you nervous and a little uncomfortable think about how it makes your Little feel. Suddenly there's this new person in their life.

You're probably different from people your Little knows. Your Little might not know how to react to you. Your behavior could be intimidating or discomfoting or seem just a little strange to your Little. So remember to go slow and be prepared for reactions you might not like or anticipate. It's okay. It's part of the learning process... part of getting to know each other.

You always need to be very observant of the reactions of your Little, but initially you need to be even more observant. Pay careful attention to what you do and say and to the reactions you get. Work at modifying your actions in ways that lead to smiles and your Little reaching out. Try not to do those things that lead to withdrawal and disengagement. We know this seems obvious. We mention it here to bring it into your thinking and planning.

It can take some time for each of you to get comfortable with the other. Small things can have a big impact on this process, a word of praise, a friendly smile, a warm greeting. Try and keep from making value judgments which can distance you from your Little.

## **Don't rush yourself... or your Little.**

Each time you meet you'll gain a little more understanding and your Little will become a little more comfortable. Think of it as a journey to a new country. "Each day you see something new and wonderful and learn a new thing about the people who live there. You begin to understand and then speak the language. The 'we and they' you began with gradually turns into 'us.'

It's not a straight path. It's a twisting path with some bumps in the road and a few dead ends that you need to get past. Luckily there are lots of people with great experience and advice to help you out. Take advantage of these people. They've traveled the path and can guide you past the potholes. A fabulous future awaits you and your Little.

Enjoy the journey. Have fun, be fun.

# Mentor Job Description

Being a Big Brother or Big Sister is not the same for everyone. Each relationship is different because each person is unique. The match team consists of the child, volunteer, teacher, and the Match Support Worker, who is responsible for the overall management of the match. The success of the match friendship depends greatly on the efforts of the Big, the Little, and the School Partner. Each one plays an important role in helping build a meaningful friendship.

## **A Friend**

- Someone who will suspend judgment and unconditionally care for the child the way he/she is.
- Someone who shows he/she cares by sharing, and giving verbal praise
- Someone who provides emotional support and a non-judgmental ear
- Someone who enhances the child's feelings of self-worth

## **A Mentor**

- Exhibits a standard of behavior for modeling honesty, truth and respect for others
- Involves his/her Little in safe and healthy activities within the school environment.
- Supports growth and skill development through tutoring, activities at recess or in the classroom.
- Encourages projects and developing hobbies
- Is consistent, dependable, and honest with his/her little
- Shares his/her thoughts, feelings, fears and dreams to enhance openness
- Arrives at Little's school in appropriate attire on time and when scheduled

## **An Adult Resource**

- Helps his/her Little explore options, values, careers, and educational opportunities
- Helps his/her little deal with changes and issues affecting his/her life
- Helps his/her little sort out feelings and channel them appropriately
- Helps his/her Little to focus and concentrate in classroom and serves as a tutor if needed.

## **A Responsible Volunteer and Program Member**

- Commits to the match relationship as long as he/she is able
- Communicates regularly and in a timely manner with his/her Match Support Worker
- Shares and discusses problems/concerns regarding the match with his/her Match Support Worker
- Attends scheduled meetings with his/her Match Support Worker

# What is a "Big"?

## What makes a successful "Big"?

### Successful Bigs...

- Emphasize friendship over changing the behavior of the child.
- Are not authoritarian.
- Decide activities together with Littles.
- Are consistent & dependable.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Are patient.
- Focus on having fun.
- Set boundaries and limits.
- Acknowledge that positive impact on the child comes after the relationship is built.
- Put a child's safety and well-being first.
- Help their Little(s) form goals

### What a "Big" Is Not..

- An ATM
- Childcare provider
- Parent
- Peer
- Therapist

# How Can I Make the Most of My Time with My Little?

We all had someone our lives, other than a parent, who made a difference to us. This is what you can do for a child in our program. It's really pretty simple-it's a matter of making yourself available on a consistent basis. It's showing you care. It's having fun with a child. It's listening to them talk about whatever is going on in their lives. It's a series of small, teachable moments that, in the end, make a BIG difference. Littles in our program show improvement in socio-emotional competence, educational success, and avoidance of risky behaviors. In fact, over 80% of our Littles showed improvement in each of these areas according to a 2011 study.

School-Based Mentoring is not a classroom program, and it's not tutoring. School-Based Mentoring is one-to-one mentoring that takes place in the schools. Of course, many students do talk with their mentors about class, or do homework, or read together, but it's really all about friendship and guidance.

## **To make the most of your relationship...**

**Be a good friend.** Listen, have fun, take time to get to know this new person in your life. Don't set out to impose mandatory changes in the Little. Positive behaviors will flow after your Little trusts you and your Little grows in being more secure, not by your declaring mandatory new behaviors that the Little has to do.

**Be Consistent.** Remember that consistent, caring contact with your Little is the key to developing a friendship that will influence his or her life. Show the child you think your time together is important by being there and remember that changes in your Little tend to take time. Consistency will increase your opportunities to make a difference.

**Be patient.** Often Littles won't say "thank you"-but this doesn't mean they aren't enjoying the time with you. It just takes time for the relationship to form. Allow your Little to develop the friendship at his or her own pace. It is of vital importance that you allow time to get to know your Little gradually. Give your Little the opportunity to learn to trust and place confidence in you. Your Little may have their guard up to avoid being hurt.

**Set Limits with your Little.** You must set limits, and say "No" when necessary. BBBS staff is available for problem-solving if you are feeling frustrated or unsure of appropriate match boundaries.

**Set Boundaries for yourself.** Mentors have an important role, but this doesn't include replacing family or social service (acting as their counselor, for example). A mentor can help guide a young person to the appropriate source for additional help. BBBS staff is available for problem-solving if you are feeling frustrated or unsure of appropriate match boundaries.

**Regularly communicate with your Match Support Specialist.** We will contact you regularly to provide assistance and give feedback on how you're making a difference. Anytime you are unsure about what to do or how to handle a situation, your Match Support Specialists are here to help. You don't need to wait for us to contact you.

**Realize that problems may come up.** It's normal for problems to arise in a match relationship. Try to balance your expectations of what it will be like with your Little and be realistic about how long the relationship will take to develop.

**Be Honest.** We all make mistakes! Children know adults are not perfect. If you make a mistake, admit it. Say you're sorry. It's a skill a child may learn only from you.

**Model appropriate behavior.** Be sure to model courteous behavior and say to the child "Thank You" when appropriate. Avoid sarcasm, as it can be very detrimental to a new relationship.

**Encourage your Little.** Many children struggle with self-esteem. Words of encouragement in a critical world work miracles in the life of a child. Your faith in your Little can be the greatest gift you can give.

**Don't know it all.** Be open to learning new things and withholding your judgement.

### **Celebrate Differences**

Experienced mentors report that working with a young person of a different background or ethnicity broadened their own horizons and deepened their understanding of other people and cultures.

**Don't expect to see dramatic changes in the child's behavior. It may be that the seeds you sow now as a friend and mentor will not bear fruit for many years. Take heart, you are making a difference!! Take it easy, be yourself, be patient, and just **have fun!****

## Top Suggestions for Mentors

1. Have realistic expectations-accept your Little “as is”
2. Set limits
3. Be patient
4. Money is not the object
5. Keep regular contact
6. Avoid over-involvement
7. Do not try to be a problem solver
8. Recast problems as learning opportunities
9. Do not crowd
10. Focus on the mentee's strengths
11. Actions speak louder than words

# Building Self-Confidence and Self-Competence in Your Little

First of all, it's important to recognize the signs of a lack of self-confidence in your Little. Self-confidence is feeling able, capable, smart, and strong. Self-respect is believing that one has value and is important. If your Little is insecure about trying new activities, insecure about their appearance, is engaging in bullying behavior or excessively dominating behavior, is overly anxious or underachieving, they likely are lacking in confidence.

## How Do You Help to Build Your Little's Self-Confidence?

As a mentor, you have a tremendous opportunity to help your Little improve his or her self-confidence, or self-esteem. Here are some suggestions:

### **Model self-confidence**

Show your Little that you feel good about yourself by praising yourself and saying good things about yourself. Children learn by observing that it is possible to praise oneself as well as make a mistake.

### **Listen attentively**

Nothing is more empowering for a child than receiving focused attention.

**Express your feelings and encourage your Littles to do the same.** Acknowledge and affirm feelings and thoughts; don't try to talk your Little out of a feeling he or she has. With younger children you can make a feelings list or ask the child to draw a picture of what each feeling means to him or her.

**Praise the Little's behavior.** It doesn't have to be a particularly outstanding behavior. Notice and encourage everyday good behavior as well as the remarkable.

**Reinforce repeatedly that the child is lovable and capable.** Pats on the back, and saying "I like you" will reinforce lovability. Assistance with tasks such as homework can reinforce capability. Help the child try new things.

## How Do You Help to Build Your Little's Self-Competence?

Many Littles are teased or excluded by their peers and/or adults due to their poor social skills and/or academic skills. Many Littles lack the insight to realize what the problem is and how to correct it. Following are suggested activities which, through your friendship and support, can influence your Little's self-competence and peer relationships:

- talk about friends you each have, what your best friend is like, and what it means to be a friend
- help your Little work through problems he/she may be having at home, school, with friends, etc. Listen, be supportive, and offer advice where appropriate
- role-play different situations with your Little such as an encounter with a teacher, school bully, etc. Help our Little to understand the teacher and bully's feelings as well as his/her own
- reinforce good hygiene
- discuss the importance of good manners {a smile, "thank-you," etc.}.
- encourage your little to get involved in recreational groups {after-school activities, scouts, junior achievement, church youth etc.}
- work with your Little on a family song, a short poem, or a childhood story
- help your Little decide what subjects to take in high school, talk about future goals for college or employment

## 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 you are contemplating or entering a mentoring relationship with a Little. However, research shows that when mentors 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 your Little's teacher (and perhaps parent) 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, you and your Little have most likely invested a lot into each other and the relationship. During the closure process, it is important that you communicate to your Little your appreciation of him or her and your hope and expectation that he or she will be successful and happy.

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 being matched again with another Little, but there are many other ways in which you can support the agency. You and your Match Support staff should talk about the best options for you.