



Big Brothers Big Sisters

Parent/Guardian Orientation Guide

Community Based Program

start something

Think of the possibilities. **What will you start?**



About Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Program

For more than 100 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) has operated under the belief that inherent in every child is the ability to succeed and thrive in life. As the nation's largest donor and volunteer supported mentoring network, BBBS makes meaningful, monitored matches between adult volunteers ("Bigs") and children ("Littles"), ages 7 through 17.

Founded in 1972, Big Brothers Big supports 13 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wells and Whitley counties in Indiana as well as Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties in Michigan.

About Our Community Based Program

BBBS helps children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships with measurable impact. In the Community Based mentoring program, children (Littles) are matched to approved adult mentors (Bigs) based upon shared interests and preferences. These matches meet periodically in the community to share fun activities like playing catch, going to the zoo, or baking cookies. Matches meet two (2) to four (4) times per month for at least one year.

Eligibility Guidelines

The Little prospect must live in one of the above counties and be between the ages of 7 and 15. However, BBBS serves children until the Child reaches the age of 18 or until they graduate from high school.

The majority of Littles are from a single parent household but consideration is given to children from two-parent households, too.

The Little prospect, the parent/guardian and the Agency should agree that the services offered by the BBBS program is needed and desired. The Enrollment Specialist, with the input from the parent/guardian, will determine whether the Little prospect's needs go beyond the scope of the BBBS programs. In these instances, the Enrollment Specialist will attempt to find alternative services for the Little prospect which can better suit the needs.

The legal custodian must give written permission before the Little prospect is accepted into the program. The Little prospect must have the capacity and willingness to maintain a relationship with a volunteer mentor. The Little prospect should be able and willing to fulfill the program time requirements.

Exceptions to any of these eligibility guidelines must be approved by the Executive Director or his/her designee.



Program Participants

Participants In The Program Include You!

We Need You To Be An Active Partner. Working together, parents/guardians, volunteers, and BBBS staff members plan activities and opportunities that can have a powerful and positive impact on your child.

Who are our Big Brothers and Big Sisters?

- Men and women who work and live in your community;
- High school and college students from nearby schools;
- Retirees, military men and women, members of congregations or civic organizations; and...
- Just ordinary people who are extraordinary.

What they all have in common is a sincere interest in being a friend and mentor to a child. They are not paid – *all of their time is volunteered.*

How do we select volunteers for BBBS?

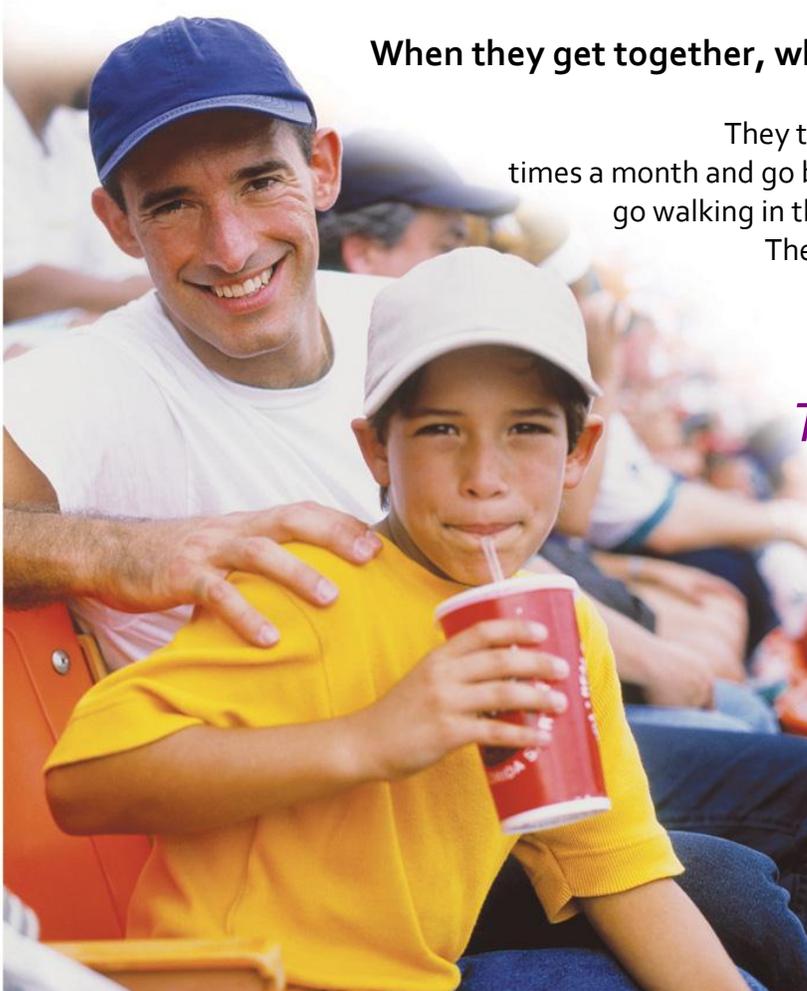
Each volunteer must complete a screening process that includes:

- A written application;
- A criminal history record check;
- At least three references;
- An in-person interview;
- Questions about his/her home environment;
- A professional decision about whether they should volunteer with a child; and
- An orientation and training process that includes safety tips and information which will help to encourage your child's healthy development.



Who are our Little Brothers and Little Sisters?

Most children in our community-based programs come to us through their parent or guardian. We also reach out to involve children through churches, schools, youth service agencies, and other referral sources.



When they get together, what do matches do?

They typically meet two to four times a month and go biking, fishing, to a show, go walking in the park or to a ball game. They also might bake a cake or build a birdhouse.

They go places and do things that they both enjoy doing.

You as a parent/guardian should know about each activity and give your approval in advance. Also, you should follow-up when your child returns home to talk openly with them:

What did they do? Where did they go? Who else was there?

Make sure that your child feels okay when they're with their Big.



BBBS Support: How BBBS Works with You, Your Child & the Big

BBBBS works hard to support the relationship between Bigs and Littles. Our goal is for the relationship to be as successful as possible for everyone. Bigs and Littles work with their Match Support Specialist/Team from their BBBS agency.

It is important for us to talk with you every month for the first year of the match. This allows us to provide support, and offer ideas if problems arise. The initial weeks and possibly months of a match are an adjustment period for the Big, the Little and you. *Be patient, relationships take time.* **You will be contacted:**

- Two weeks after the match Introduction;
- Once a month the first year;
- In person for a 6-month review; and
- In person for a 1 year anniversary review.

After the first year we will also contact you quarterly. Please return call within 48 hours.

The Match Support Specialist is the main link between you, your child, the Big Brother or Big Sister and the agency for as long as your child and the Big are matched. Hopefully, you will consider your Match Support Specialist a friend who will listen to you and help in any way possible.

That's not all that the Match Support Team provides for your child's match. They also:

- Find information and resources that might interest you;
- Connect you with community resources;
- Keep you updated on activities offered by the agency;
- Help you communicate with your child and his/her Big;
- Work with you on any conflicts that might come up; and
- Celebrate successes.





Here are some good reasons for calling your Match Support Specialist:

- To question your child's safety or well-being;
- Discuss general concerns you are having about the Big Brother or Big Sister;
- Report any changes in address or phone number;
- Report any emergency situations or your child's illness;
- Report any important family changes: legal, social or dynamic;
- Report changes or concerns at school; and
- Report success stories about your child's progress or special honors.

Contact your Match Support Specialist by phone and/or email--whichever is most convenient for you.

Call: 260-456-1600 or 888-456-1600 and ask for Match Support.

If your Match Support Specialist is not available please ask another Match Support Team member for assistance. We make it a priority to serve you when you need it.





Your Role: We need you to be an active partner!

We know it takes a special parent/guardian to get a Big Brother or Big Sister for his/her child.

Parents/guardians are important partners in helping to build a meaningful friendship between their children and volunteers.

What you can do to help:

Be welcoming to your child's Big! Talk to your BBBS Match Support staff!

- Share your concerns, hopes and wishes for your child with your BBBS Match Support Specialist. He/she will tell these to your child's Big and help them in planning activities that are fun and educational.
- Help find the best times for outings to occur, and make sure that your child is prepared: proper clothing, ready on time, limited spending money if needed.
- Make sure that you know details of each planned activity (and have given your approval in advance), when your child will be picked up and when you can expect them back. Make a point of being home. If you are not home and your child is allowed to be home by themselves, be sure they arrive safely and on time.
- Always ask about what the activities were, where they took place, who else was involved and your child's feelings about the visit.
- During the first year, monthly calls or visits from your BBBS Match Support Specialist are required. You can discuss your child's experiences: what activities have they been involved in, what does your child say about the outings? What makes you happy about being in the program?
- Please don't talk about your child with the Big Brother or Big Sister when the child is present. If there is something you think they should know, call them when your child is away.
- Please don't ask that siblings be included. This is special for your child. The volunteer may ask siblings or friends to participate in outings on special occasions. You ARE encouraged to participate in events and agency sponsored activity that invites parents to join in.



- Big Brothers and Big Sisters are “older friends.” They are not substitute parents, baby sitters, disciplinarians, financial support, taxi service, or counselors. Open communication is important. Your rules and disciplines should be respected.
- Time with a Big is special. The Big Brother or Big Sister should not be considered a “privilege”. Don’t punish your child by saying they can’t see their Big. Often, this one-to-one adult time will actually help your child’s overall behavior. If, however, the child is being punished, perhaps the outing should be restricted in some other way instead of cancelled. Please ensure the volunteer understands the circumstances so he/she can cooperate, all in the best interest of the child.
- Be flexible. Remember that the Big Brother or Big Sister is a volunteer, and has a busy schedule too. Both you and the volunteer should make sure to call ahead to cancel any planned visits.
- Help make sure that your child returns phone calls and stays in regular contact with the volunteer. Regular contact is important to the success of the match.
- Overnight outings between the Big Brother/Big Sister and your child are allowed **after six months** of successful match, and then only after a consultation with a Match Support staff member and with your permission.
- Give it time: This relationship needs time to develop – at least three months – so don’t judge it too quickly.
- Please do not assume that the volunteer has lots of money and will always pay for your child during activities. The volunteer generally pays for the admission and transportation to events. You may wish to give the child extra spending money for additional purchases.

Remember, we all have the same goal – the health and well-being of your child!

In summary, the top rules are:

- 1. Know what your child is doing with his/her Big Brother or Big Sister, and**
- 2. Communicate any concerns to BBBS staff.**



WE NEED YOU TO BE AN ACTIVE PARTNER!

The Processing Steps

Inquiries or referrals may be from a parent or other community youth services agency or school. Following the inquiry or referral, the parent/guardian will receive an informational letter along with our eligibility guidelines and an application for a child for the Community Based program.

Once BBBS receives the completed application, the Agency staff person will contact the family to schedule an intake interview. This interview will last about 1 ½ hours and includes:

- Orientation which allows the parent/guardian to ask questions about the program and child to have an understanding what the program involves;
- An interview with parent/guardian;
- An interview with the child;
- Personal safety training for the child; and
- Completion of required paperwork to enter the program.

Once the intake is complete, families are notified of acceptance or in special cases, a referral to another agency.

Acceptance in the Program

After a child is accepted into our program, he/she is placed on a waiting list. BBBS staff will be providing monthly activities through a First Friends program for children waiting to be matched. Transportation is provided for those children in Allen County. Waiting list updates are completed every six months, where the Match Support Specialist contacts the parent/guardian for the most current information. This update continues with eligible children until the match occurs.

Matching the Child and the Volunteer

Matches do not occur on a first come, first serve basis. Rather matches are based upon the participant interests and preferences documented in the interview. When a potential Big is found the Match Support Specialist contacts the parent/guardian to present the information about the volunteer. As the parent/guardian, you will have the opportunity to accept or deny the volunteer presented to you. If the volunteer is accepted, a Match-up Meeting is scheduled.

Match-up Meeting

The Match-up Meeting is generally scheduled at your home, at the Agency, or wherever you are the most comfortable. A Match Support Specialist will meet with you, your child, and the volunteer in order to facilitate the first meeting, review guidelines for the match and to help participants become comfortable with each other.



On-Going Support

Throughout your involvement in our program, the Match Support Team will be in touch with you on a monthly basis. Most of the contact will be by phone with periodic in-person contacts. Match Support offers professional support to matches and families. Match Support will alternate monthly phone contacts between the parent/guardian and child.

Confidentiality

In order for BBBS to provide a responsible and professional service to clients, it is necessary to ask all Participants--Volunteers, Parents/Guardians and Children—to reveal extensive personal information about themselves and their families. The Agency respects the confidentiality of the Participant records. Information is shared only as necessary among professional staff. The Program Committee of the Board of Directors, including the Board President and representatives from BBBS of America, may have access to confidential information as needed to fulfill its function. Members of the Committee shall be required to read and sign the Confidentiality Agreement. In all cases of review of questionable matches or intake, names will be withheld from all professional staff.

Information which is considered confidential with the Agency includes, but is not limited to:

- All volunteer and client files including, but not limited to, applications, transcribed records or interviews, psychological test results, references, and information supplied by referring sources and other agencies;
- Casework logs; and
- Meetings and telephone conversations with Participants, wherein personal information is shared.

The BBBS Confidentiality Policy states that this personal information shared is confidential, only allowing release of information outside the Agency when an appropriately signed consent to release form is obtained. Please see the complete Confidentiality Policy provided separately.





The Ground Rules: Big Brothers Big Sisters Participant Agreement

By enrolling your child in the Program, you agree:

1. To be in contact (phone calls and in-person meetings) with the Match Support Specialist as required. During the first year, these contacts will be monthly. After one year, the contacts will be quarterly.
2. To return phone calls from BBBS and from other Match Participants (Child/Parent/Volunteer) within 48 hours.
3. To support regular, in-person contact with the Child and to support the appropriate activities designed to foster the Match according to the individual program guidelines. Volunteer should make arrangements in advance, communicating any changes in the schedule or activity.
4. Not to have an overnight visit during the first six months. After six months, the Parent/Guardian must approve of the overnight visit and must inquire about the sleeping arrangements. For overnight visits, the Volunteer must maintain a separate sleeping area or at least, a separate bed for the Child. Volunteers or Parent/Guardian must notify the Match Support Team prior to any overnight visit. Overnight visits should be occasional—i.e. should not be excessive.
5. To participate in Empower educational activities.
6. To provide safe environment for child: 1) Volunteer must have adequate car insurance and children must always wear a seat belt in accordance with laws; 2) Child must wear life vest when participating in activities such as boating or water sports; and 3) Volunteer and Parent/Guardian will support safety guidelines by encouraging compliance by Child.
7. To contact BBBS when problems arise which may affect the Match relationship. To report any significant changes in the Child's behavior, especially when BBBS support may be needed.
8. To report any changes in contact information such as phone number, address, etc.
9. To participate in Match Support community activities as desired and training programs as required which are offered by BBBS.
10. To contact BBBS if closure of the Match is contemplated. This contact should be made before ending the Match.



A Top Priority-Child Safety: Child Protection in BBBS Programs

Children's safety is our #1 priority. We focus on the child's safety and well-being throughout the match, not just at the beginning.

We want to work together to keep your child safe. 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.

- You should approve all 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 Specialist when you have questions.
- When your Big takes your child out, the Big should always stay with them and not leave them with someone else.
- Volunteers must comply with state seat belt and child car seat laws.
- Your child must wear a life vest when boating or doing other water sports with the Big.
- 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 your child should sleep in a separate bed.
- 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.
- Of course, showing pornography or sexual material is never acceptable.



Here are some patterns that you should discuss with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Staff:

- 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; and
- Your child's Big takes an excessive amount of pictures or videos of your child.

We know that you work with your child to teach him/her skills to help keep him/her safe from violence – whether it's online, at school, at home and in your community. We require that all match participants (i.e. parent/guardian, child, and volunteer) complete *Empower Child Program* (Sex Abuse Education). 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.**

It's important that the parent/guardian communicates openly and often on these subjects.

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, please contact Big Brothers Big Sisters' staff for support at 260-456-1600 or 888-456-1600.





Communication

Tips for Parents and Guardians

- **Even when you are busy, make the time to talk with your child.** Sometimes the best discussions take place while you are driving the car or cooking supper.
- **Listen to the “Little Stuff.”** If they know you are listening, they are more likely to trust you enough to talk about everything in their life.
- **Listen between the lines.** Because most children find it hard to talk about things that really matter, you need to listen harder to what they may be trying to say.
- **Ask their opinion.** We all like it when someone asks our opinion.

You don't have to ask about just important issues – ask them simple things too.



Would they rather go visit Aunt Denise or Grandma today?

Do they prefer McDonalds or Burger King?

What do they enjoy doing most with their Big Brother or Big Sister?

- **Don't interrupt.** Give your children some extra time to explain their opinion or desires, even if you think you know what they are going to say.
- **Catch them doing something good!** Take that opportunity to praise them and tell them that you are proud of them.



Frequently Asked Questions

Children:

1. How long will I have to wait to get a Big Brother or Big Sister (“Big”)?

We do not match on a first come first serve basis. In finding an appropriate mentor for a child, we match based upon similar likes, interests and personalities.

2. What will a Big do with me?

You and your Big will be able to pick activities together that both of you enjoy. Remember, your Big is not here to spend money on you, but to spend time with you.

3. How often will I see my Big?

Our rules say that you and your Big are to get together at least two (2) to four (4) times a month for the first year you are matched. The actual days you get together will depend on your schedule and that of your parent’s/guardian’s and the Big’s schedule.

4. How old will my Big be?

Our volunteers vary in age. If a volunteer is 17 and older and has a valid driver’s license, he/she is eligible to go through our screening process to become a Big.

* In some cases, an exception may be made for a 16 year-old volunteer, so long as he/she is at least a junior in high school and has a valid driver’s license.

5. Why does my Big never do anything I want to do?

The match with your Big is not about just doing the things you want to do, but it’s about taking turns doing things both of you enjoy and learning new, exciting things about each other. Just keep in mind, for the most part when you get matched with a Big, you will have some similar interests. This is also explained to your Big.



Frequently Asked Questions

Children (cont'd):

6. Why does my Big never spend money on me?

This program is not about “buying things” for their Little, it is about spending “time” with a Little. We ask Bigs to take care of expenses of certain activities that they do together with their Little, like going out to eat, to the movies, etc. We also tell Bigs that they are welcome to buy small gifts for birthdays and Christmas. **A Little is expected to bring his/her own money if he/she wishes to purchase items during the activity with their Big.**

7. Can I spend the night with my Big?

Our agency has an overnight visit policy. We do not encourage overnight visits, but it is allowed after six months from the match-up date as long as your parent/guardian, your Big, and you feel comfortable with this. It is necessary that you inform your Match Support Specialist of an overnight visit before it takes place.

8. Will my Big help me with my homework?

This is not a tutoring program, but usually Bigs will occasionally help the Littles with homework if asked by the Little.

9. My Big isn't as young as I hoped he/she would have been; can I get somebody younger?

Older volunteers are able to do many of the same things that a younger volunteer could do. We ask you about things that you really enjoy doing and then try to find a volunteer that likes some of the same things that you do. Talk to your Big about things that you would like to do with him/her.

10. My Big just wants to do boring stuff or just one thing whenever we get together?

Talk to your Big about things that you are interested in. Also remember that if you do a bunch of things every time that you get together that you will run out of things to do.



Frequently Asked Questions

Parent/Guardian:

1. **How does Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) screen their volunteers? How do I know this volunteer is safe?**

There is a screening process that our volunteers go through before being able to be matched with a child. There is an interview process where at one point the Enrollment Specialist visits the volunteer in their home or wherever is the most convenient for them (examples include a local library, our agency, their workplace, etc.). We also do reference checks as well as police and driving record checks. We also make sure that the volunteers have adequate car insurance.

2. **How much money does the program cost?**

The program does not cost anything. Our agency or the volunteers are required to pay for the activities that they would be doing with your child, however the spending is limited and we ask that our volunteers refrain from buying gifts unless for a special reason like Christmas and birthdays. **You are able to send extra spending money along if a child may want to purchase something at an outing or given activity.**

3. **Does my ex-husband have to consent to me applying for a Big Brother or Big Sister ("Big") for my child?**

The parent/guardian that has full custody of the child is the one who has authority to give consent. Any other family members or individuals do not have a say as to whether or not your child can be a part of BBBS. However, we do take into consideration the needs of your child and problems that may be caused if another individual or person in the home would not want a volunteer to be a part of your child's life.

4. **If I remarry, does this mean my child will have to stop seeing his/her Big?**

Not necessarily. If your child has formed an established relationship with a Big, we would definitely encourage its continuance. However, we also do not want to cause any problems with forming a relationship with the new parent in the home. In this situation, you can talk with your Match Support Specialist at BBBS to decide what would be best for your child.



Frequently Asked Questions

Parent/Guardian: (cont'd)

5. Do I get to see the police and reference checks or interviews of my child's Big?

No, as we have a confidentiality policy. This policy also covers the information that we obtain from you about you and your family. Any information that is gathered about those in our program is kept confidential. We have volunteers as well as yourself sign a confidentiality policy. As mentioned, we have a thorough screening process and will give you demographic information about the volunteer who is chosen for your child.

6. Do you do drug tests on your volunteers?

No, we do not do drug tests, but we do have a drug and alcohol policy in our volunteer agreement, which all volunteers have to sign. It states that volunteers are required to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages before and during match activities as well as they must abstain from the use of illegal drugs while being a volunteer in our program.

7. What type of relationship am I to have with my child's Big?

The Big's role is primarily to spend one-on-one time with your child. It is okay to let a volunteer know about other instances that may be going on in your family, but remember that our volunteers are not trained therapists and are there to focus their time and attention on your child. We do encourage you to get to know your child's Big by asking him/her what activities are planned with your child; also, you should ask your child after each activity what he/she did with the Big and what they discussed. Keep your child's Big informed of areas in your child's life that are improving or that need to be improved so that the Big can help encourage your child in areas that need focus.

8. How long can my child keep his/her Big?

Once your child is in our program he/she can remain matched or on the waiting list till he/she is 18 or graduates high school as long as the match remains open—i.e. the Big and Little remain matched.



Frequently Asked Questions

Parent/Guardian: (cont'd)

9. Can the BBBS program help my child with his/her school?

Keep in mind that this is not a tutoring program, but most of our volunteers are willing to assist a child with occasional homework or a specific project.

10. How long will my child have to wait before she/he gets matched with a Big?

This is not a first come first serve program. We match children and volunteers based upon factors such as personality, common interests, location, and other preferences. While children are waiting to be matched, we provide activities for them through our First Friends program. These activities take place primarily in the Fort Wayne area, but there are activities which occasionally take place in other counties. Generally girls are matched more quickly than boys because we do have a higher volume of female volunteers who are part of the program (versus male volunteers).

11. How do you find the right Big for my child?

As mentioned, we match children and volunteers based upon factors such as personality, common interests, location, and other preferences. During the interviews we have with you and your child, we ask questions such as: "What are you looking for in a volunteer?", and "What preferences do you have for your child's Big?" We also ask similar questions of the volunteers. The Enrollment Specialist takes into consideration these preferences and makes an assessment as to the volunteer we feel would be in the best interest of your child. It is very important that you are honest during the interviews so that we can find a successful match for your child.

12. What types of questions will I be asked during the interview?

All the information we obtain from you is treated confidentially. Many of the questions may seem rather personal, but we ask them to help us better understand your child and his/her needs. This will better enable us to be able to find the right volunteer for your child.



Frequently Asked Questions

Parent/Guardian: (cont'd)

13. How often should my child's Big get together with my child?

It is our policy that matches should get together two (2) to four (4) times a month for at least a year. The days and times of these activities depend on your schedule and the Big's schedule. After the match's first year anniversary, we recommend the Big and the Little get together at least one (1) to two (2) times a month. Also, on the one-year anniversary of the match, your Match Support Specialist will meet with your child and his/her Big for a review; at that time you will discuss the continuation of their match with the Match Support Specialist.

14. How does the First Friends program work?

Once your child has been accepted into our program, he/she is placed on a waiting list. During this time, your child can participate in First Friends activities. These activities take place in small groups (example: 1 staff members and 4 – 5 children). We also have volunteers who will pick your child up along with one or two others and will take him/her to the activity, monitor your child there, and bring your child back home. Remember that most of these activities take place in the Fort Wayne area. So, if you live in another county and you want your child to come to some of these activities, you may need to provide your own transportation. Occasionally, activities are held in other counties outside Allen county for children on the waiting list in these counties; if you live in one of these counties, you will be informed of these events so that you child may attend them. Your child is able to attend these First Friends activities until he/she is matched with their own Big.

15. I don't feel that my child is getting together enough with his/her Big (e.g. once a month is just not enough). Could my child participate in First Friends activities, too?

If this is the situation, your Match Support Specialist will work with you and the Big to ensure that time requirements are being met. We only have a limited number of First Friends volunteers; so we only allow children who are on the waiting list to come to the activities. Remember that if your child is matched, he/she is getting interaction with a mentoring adult whereas other children who are still waiting do not have this opportunity except through First Friends. We can also refer you to other agencies or programs in the area which may provide additional resources and support for your child.



Frequently Asked Questions

Parent/Guardian: (cont'd)

16. What do I do if I don't like the Big that you may choose for my child?

You do have the right to reject a Big we may have selected for your child. Remember, before matching your child with a Big we will give you a summary profile of the potential Big and let you decide whether or not you feel that this would be a good match for your child. If a Big is rejected, your child will then remain on the waiting list till we do find a suitable volunteer to match with your child.