

Community-Based Program Match Safety Policies

Updated: February 2023

The purpose of these safety policies is to ensure all members of “Team Kid” are fully supported as they develop strong, healthy relationship over time. Our common commitment is to provide safety policies that allow parents/caregivers, Bigs/mentors, and Littles to engage authentically, safely, comfortably, and enjoyably. Ultimately, these practices support our mission to ignite the great power and promise of youth through one-to-one mentoring.

Many of these policies are informed by the American Pediatric Association; state and federal laws, policy, and guidance; and child safety best practice research and many are required by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America’s Standards of Practice.

Please note that your continued participation in this program signals your agreement to abide by these policies for the life of your mentoring relationship. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding any one of our policies, we encourage you to reach out to us for greater clarification and guidance.

Match Support

1. A Match Support Coordinator will be assigned to each match. This Match Support Coordinator may rotate month to month.
2. The Match Support Coordinator will be in touch with all parties on a monthly basis (during the first year) or on a quarterly basis (after the first year) to monitor the match, ensure child safety, coach the relationship, serve as a relationship and community resource, and administer youth outcome and relationship surveys.
3. **It is a requirement for Bigs, parents/caregivers and Littles to the Match Support Coordinator in a timely fashion when they reach out to schedule regular match support calls.**
4. **Further, Bigs and parents/caregivers must notify BBBSL of any issues arising with the match or with changes in contact information including changes to address and changes in guardianship.**
5. Should a parent/caregiver or Big repeatedly not respond to the Match Support Coordinator in a timely fashion, BBBSL may decide to close the match.
6. Bigs and parents/caregivers are always encouraged to reach out to the Match Support Coordinator at any time should they need support of any nature.

Monthly Match Outings & Match Closure

7. The Big and Little commit to meeting a minimum of 4 hours over two (2) outings per month for a minimum of 12 months. Exceptions to this frequency, must be agreed upon by all parties and documented with BBBSL. All parties should set clear expectations regarding frequency, follow through on the commitment, communicate should a temporary timing issue arise, and not pressure each other for additional time beyond the mutually agreed-upon frequency.
8. If any party has concerns regarding this commitment, they must contact their Match Support Coordinator as soon as the concerns arise.
9. If any party is considering match closure, it is that person's responsibility to inform their Match Support Coordinator. No member of the match should pursue closure without first having a conversation with BBBSL. Standard match closure procedures must be followed and are designed to preserve the wellbeing of the child.
10. If all parties agree to continue the match beyond the 12-month commitment (yay!), Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lowcountry (BBBSL) will support the match until the Little graduates from high school.

Communication, Pick-up, and Drop-Off

11. The Big will communicate directly with the Little's parent/caregiver when the Little is picked up (via phone or text) and will inform the parent/caregiver where they are going and when they will return.
12. Parents/caregivers are responsible for communicating to the Big their communication preferences and to explicitly state in what ways they approve their child to communicate with their Big (parent's phone/text/email or Little's personal phone/text/email). Bigs are required to abide by parent/caregiver wishes.
13. Unless explicitly agreed to in writing by the parent/caregiver, the parent/caregiver or a pre-arranged responsible adult must be at the drop off location upon the Little's return.
14. Regardless of parent/caregiver practice, no Big may ever drop off Littles under nine (9) years of age to a location unattended by an adult for ANY reason. Should a complication arise, Bigs should contact BBBSL immediately.
15. Bigs and parents/caregivers are required to respond to each other in a timely manner during all match outings.

Emergencies

16. In the case of an emergency when the Little's life is at risk, Bigs should call 9-1-1 immediately.
17. Following, they should call the parent/caregiver and BBBSL.

Social Media

18. Bigs and Littles are permitted to connect via social media and to share positive stories about BBBSL and their Littles while following the policy below:

- a. Bigs must NOT participate in online communication with/about their Littles unless they have received approval to do so from their Little's parent/caregiver
- b. If they secure permission, they will only communicate with Littles 13 years or older in accordance with social media platform age limits
- c. If they do engage, Bigs must provide the parent/caregiver links to their pages so they may monitor such engagement
- d. Bigs must never post pictures of their Little online unless they have the consent of the child's parent/caregiver.
- e. Bigs will refrain from posting the last name of their Little and their Little's parent/caregiver
- f. Bigs will refrain from posting any contact information, any other identifying information for their Little, and anything confidential about the Little/their family (i.e.: child's home address, school the child attends, where the parent works, detailed information about conversations, family information, etc. etc.).
- g. Bigs will refrain from posting anything that could be perceived as judgmental or offensive to their Little or their parent/caregiver, family, or friends

Home Visits & Other Parties

19. The first 90-days of the match relationship must ONLY involve one-to-one outings in the community.
20. After 90-days, the Big may request approval from their Match Support Coordinator and the Little's parent/caregiver to do an outing at their home and/or to introduce the Little to a friend or family member.
21. Parents/caregivers and BBBSL MUST APPROVE these actions BEFORE they take place. If the parent/caregiver approves, the Match Support Coordinator will provide ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES for outings involving other parties and/or for home visits.
22. The Big MUST NOT bring friends/family members of the Little on outings. The only exception is to allow a sibling of the Little who is also enrolled in the BBBSL Community-Based mentoring program to attend an agency activity supervised by BBBSL staff. In such cases, BBBSL requires written permission from the secondary Little's parent (via text or email) BEFORE this action takes place.

Laws, Mandatory Reporting, & Vehicles

23. The Big is expected to comply with all local, state, and federal laws. There is to be no alcohol or drug use before meeting or in the presence of the Little. No tobacco use is permitted in the presence or during time with the Little.
24. Bigs are mandatory reporters. Should a Big have any reason to think their Little has experienced or witnessed abuse and/or neglect of any kind (through communication with the Little, hearsay, or first-hand experience), they must contact BBBSL immediately.

25. The Big and Little will wear seat belts whenever in a motor vehicle.
26. When traveling with their Big, Littles under the age of 13 must ride in the back seat at all times no matter the Little's height or weight.
27. Bigs will refrain from using their cell phone to make or receive calls and send or receive text messages while driving, and they will follow all traffic rules and laws.
28. Bigs are encouraged to keep their vehicles in good working order and to have their cell phones always charged.

Physical Contact

29. The Big and Little will respect personal space and never engage in inappropriate physical contact including, but not limited to tickling, wrestling, sitting on laps, backrubs, etc.
30. Bigs will always ask permission before hugging Littles, and they will respect and support their Littles' physical boundaries at all times. Should a Little or Big decline touch, the other party will enthusiastically respect that wish.

Overnight Stays

31. Overnight stays are PROHIBITED with limited exceptions.
32. Exceptions to this policy are ONLY permitted in cases where the relationship is greater than 12 months old, the relationship is deemed healthy by BBBSL, all policies have been adhered to throughout the match relationship, and the required BBBSL-provided authorizations have been secured for one of the specific exceptions below:
 - a. There is genuine concern for the safety of a child returning to their own home (emergency circumstances)
 - i. The Big MUST contact BBBSL immediately and involve authorities if appropriate
 - b. There is an event is formally designated by BBBSL as one that (a) is of a nature to provide an exceptionally significant developmental/educational benefit to a child or youth and (b) the event would not be possible without the Big accompanying the Little (e.g., a college visit out of town).
 - i. In such cases BBBSL must have advance notice, a full safety plan will be developed, and Bigs must receive written preauthorization from BBBSL.

High-Risk Activities

33. A High-Risk Activity Form, signed by the Big and the Little's parent/caregiver, must be submitted to Big Brothers Big Sisters prior to the match participating in the high-risk activity. Examples may include but are not limited to hunting, boating, rock-climbing, flying, river-rafting, etc.
34. Before engaging in potentially high-risk activities, Bigs should reach out to BBBSL if ever in doubt.

Firearms & Weapons

35. **Bigs must disclose the possession of firearms to BBBSL at interview and to BBBSL and the Little's parent/caregiver throughout the life of the match.**
36. During match making, the Big applicant and parent/caregiver will review and agree that weapons, firearms, and ammunition (Firearms and Weapons Policy) will be made inaccessible at all times to a child while in the Big's care unless participating in a specific activity which BBBSL staff and the parent/caregiver have approved in advance. Such approval is documented in the match file (e.g., hunter safety courses).
37. When a match is made AND **if a Big ever acquires a weapon after the match is made**, the Big must complete the BBBSL Firearms & Weapon Policy and attest to the fact that any owned weapons, firearms, or ammunition are licensed, permitted, registered, and handled in accordance with all applicable state and federal laws.
38. Whenever a Little visits a Big's home, firearms in the Big's home must be locked and unloaded with ammunition kept in a separate place.

Money & Gifts

39. Bigs are encouraged to pursue free and reduced-cost activities only and respect the parent/caregiver's role as provider.
40. Parents should never ask Bigs to cover the cost of activities and Littles should never request Bigs spend money.
41. Gifts are not encouraged, but if the Big would like to give a gift to the Little for a special occasion (holiday, birthday, milestone), they must discuss it with their Match Support Coordinator and the Little's parent/caregiver prior to purchasing or giving the gift.

Discipline

42. Bigs must not engage in disciplining the Little. The Big is a friend/mentor, not a parent/caregiver.
43. Parents/caregivers agree not to withhold their child's Big as a means of discipline. Instead, they are encouraged to communicate with the Big about the challenge they are facing with their child and to bring the Big in as a teammate in encouraging desired behavior with their child.

Policy Adherence

44. Failure to abide by any of these safety policies may result in the closure of your match.
45. BBBSL reserves the right to suspend or close any match at any time for any reason without notice or explanation.