



GUIDELINES FOR MENTOR/MENTEE SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for being a part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program and for being a defender of potential. The BBBS program wouldn't be possible without the dedication of our adult volunteers and generous and welcoming young leaders.

We want to take a moment to review important information about safety and the protection of our participants from harm. The safety of each participant in our program is our top priority. We want you to be well-informed about our agency's safety guidelines and feel prepared to handle issues that may arise. The more prepared you are, the more confident you will be, and the less likely it is that you will encounter situations that require intervention.

The guidelines and recommendations in this document were developed by our professional staff based on our years of experience supporting thousands of mentoring relationships along with input from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, child safety experts and best practices from the mentoring field. This document is not exhaustive; however, it does outline specific guidelines for most common issues.

In addition to this guide, remember that our Big Futures Mentoring Team is here to support each mentoring pair and we will provide ongoing guidance around mentoring best practices. We always want you to feel supported on your BBBS journey, so please don't hesitate to discuss with a Match Advocate any questions or concerns that may arise about safety issues or these guidelines. That's what we're here for!

Please remember that participants are required to adhere to local, state and federal laws and the guidelines provided in this document at all times; not doing so may result in the termination of a match.

BBBS Match Support: 617-956-0283

Monday-Thursday: 9-7pm, Friday: 9-5pm

Trauma Informed Mentoring

Mentors are responsible for the emotional and physical safety and well-being of their mentees when they are spending time together. If you ever suspect that a mentee is experiencing significant trauma or abuse in any form, please partner with our agency and contact your Program Coordinator as soon as possible (see **Match Confidentiality** section below). You do not need to have all the details or proof of harm to initiate a conversation with your support team.

BBBS promotes a trauma informed approach to mentoring. Your first priority as a trauma informed mentor is to be consistent, trusting and collaborative. Here's some basic guidance on a trauma-informed approach to mentoring.

Trauma Informed Behaviors

- Be respectful and patient
- Listen first, ask open-ended questions and validate responses
- Indicate a willingness to help and act collaboratively
- Role model calming strategies
- Showcase a belief in your mentee's potential
- Separate behaviors from the person
- Celebrate what makes your mentee unique and brave

Mentor Self-Care

- Process your own emotions before mentoring activities
- Believe in your own goodness and return to your reasons for doing this work
- Find a sense of centeredness around your role; Know that change takes time
- Empower your mentee to share in authoring of this relationship
- Know that you are not alone; Connect with your community of mentors and mentee supports

Following School Rules

When mentors are at a school or at an after-school site, they need to follow the school's/site's safety rules. If a mentor has any questions about the safety guidelines at their particular site, they can reach out to their Program Coordinator for more information.

As a general guideline, please use best judgment to:

- Behave in your zoom interactions with mentees the same way you would behave during a visit to their school
- Dress appropriately, professionally for your meetings at the school or on zoom
- Be responsible for the safety and wellbeing of your mentee while you are at the school or in group zoom meetings
- Do not leave the school building with your mentee unless your Program Coordinator has provided specific instructions to do so; Notify your Program Coordinator if your mentee leaves the school grounds without consent from school or BBBS permission.
- Do not meet with your mentee or communicate with them outside BBBS sponsored activities or the iMentor Platform until you have received BBBS and guardian approval to do so
- If you witness or hear from your mentee about any harmful behavior, please notify your Program Coordinator immediately (e.g. bullying, physical altercations, the use of medication without supervision, use of illegal substances, hateful or exclusionary language). Your program coordinator will provide this information directly to the school so that adults in your mentee's school environment can help maintain their safety.
- Be thoughtful when sharing media with your mentee or with other program participants. Make sure that any media you share is affirmed and empowering. If you have questions about a piece of media you are sharing in your match, please contact your Program Coordinator in advance of posting (e.g. music, social, video, etc)

Core Safety Rules:

(For all Big Futures Mentoring matches, especially those granted permission to communicate or meet outside of Big Futures' facilitated activities)

Transportation -- It is important for mentors to follow all local, state and federal laws while driving with mentees. If something unusual occurs while driving (e.g. being pulled over, any accident, etc.) it's important to let your Program Coordinator know what happened so that we can appropriately support all parties involved.

Allergies & Medications -- Mentors should be proactive and review with their mentees if there are any allergies, including food allergies, medications and health conditions.

Firearms -- If a mentor owns or acquires any weapons or firearms, they must disclose this information to BBBS staff at the time of enrollment and throughout the life of their match. BBBS staff will notify the mentee. Any gun or weapon related activities are not permitted

Substance Use -- Remember, mentors are role models at all times. As such, it's important to keep in mind how a mentor's behavior will impact a mentee's sense of safety and a mentee's impression of their mentor. For this reason, tobacco, alcohol and drug use is prohibited before and during mentoring events that involve any minor (<21 years of age). If a mentor or mentee suspects that their mentoring partner is inebriated during a mentoring event or has an unhealthy relationship with substances, they should inform their Program Coordinator immediately

Physical Contact & Boundaries -- Appropriate and positive interactions between mentors and mentees are essential in making mentees feel safe and valued. Inappropriate or harmful interactions that injure a child physically and/or emotionally are strictly prohibited. During outings:

- Hugs are okay only if initiated by the mentee or with the mentee's permission
- Mentors and mentees must change in separate areas (i.e. for swimming or at a gym)
- Mentors and mentees should never sleep or nap in the same bed
- Mentors should not physically restrain a mentee except when required in an emergency or to keep them from immediate harm
- There should be no physical contact or interaction of a sexual nature between mentors & mentees even if both are consenting adults. This is a misuse of the power dynamics in a mentoring relationship and is a violation of trust. It is not acceptable for mentors and mentees to view, use or share pornography or sexually explicit materials

Match Confidentiality -- Maintaining confidentiality between mentor and mentee is a function of a trusting relationship. It is appropriate to respect privacy in the match until a mentor is concerned for their mentee's safety or if their mentee is engaging in high-risk behavior. If a mentor ever feel that a mentee is in an unsafe circumstance, they should share this information, instinct with their Program Coordinator immediately.

- Do not promise to keep secrets in your mentoring relationship. Be honest and let mentees know about these limitations
- Mentors should never ask their Mentees to keep a secret from anyone
- If a mentee talks about hurting themselves or someone else or talks about any risky behavior, it is important for their mentor to report concerns to their Program Coordinator immediately.

Overnights -- BBBSEM does not permit overnights. Matches may not engage in overnight activities in any form, including sleepovers. This includes overnights with Little's family and/or in Little's home. Bigs are expected to always model healthy adult-child relationships and therefore are expected to set appropriate boundaries for Littles. Overnight activities can often result in overstepping these boundaries due to the care a child requires in a 24-hour period including sleeping, dressing, and mealtimes. **In extraordinary circumstances BBBSEM may issue a waiver to this policy. To apply for consideration, please talk to your Match Support Coordinator and they will complete the appropriate paperwork to submit for leadership approval. This process takes 2 weeks to complete, any overnights scheduled within that time frame will not be considered. Waivers will not be considered within the 1st year of the match.

Online & Social Media Use – Matches are often communicating or meeting virtually (using video platforms such as Zoom, Facetime, Google Hangout/Meet/Duo, Skype, Discord, gaming sites, etc.). Mentors are responsible for ensuring the safety of all online spaces in the same way they are in community spaces, including being aware of privacy settings, being present for the entire time they are in the space, not leaving a mentee in the care/presence of other individuals and following any and all safety guidelines introduced by the platform and/or BBBSEM. Mentors should remember that meeting online is an opportunity to role model good digital citizenship and discuss online safety with their mentees.

It is permitted for mentors to follow their mentees on social media **once they have permission from their mentee's guardian and our agency**. Mentors need to protect the privacy of their mentees. Social media sites, such as but not limited to, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, Tik Tok and Snapchat, gaming sites, etc. do not prevent the public viewing of information and pictures. A mentee should be made aware of all relationship details and photos that will be shared online before posting. Mentors can be great role models by:

- Customizing their privacy settings so mentors can edit what content their mentees can see. Please make the appropriate adjustments to photos, videos, comments, and posts to ensure that all content is appropriate and empowering
- Avoiding all posts of any personal information about their mentee, such as, their full name, where they live or descriptions of their personal or family background without expressed permission on the content being shared
- Honoring the confidentiality of a mentee and their family when posting comments
- Taking responsibility as a mentor and flagging concerning or unsafe behavior related to your mentee

Spending & Gift Giving – Mentees may turn to their mentors to discuss financial uncertainty. It is very important that a mentor does not attempt to financially support a mentee in these circumstances. Providing financial support compromises the role of a mentor and disenfranchises the mentee. It also alters a fragile power dynamic in a mentoring relationship, often times leading to premature and unhealthy relationship closure. If mentors feel concerned about the health and wellness of their mentee, related to their lack of resources, they should inform their Program Coordinator as soon as possible. Together, all parties will work with the mentee to identify resources. By doing so, we will role model a resourcefulness that will serve a mentee long-term

- Birthdays, holidays and match anniversaries allow for thoughtful gift giving opportunities (small gifts in the realm of a printed photo-frame, mementos from an outing, a handmade item or heartfelt card). Gift giving is not an expectation of our program. That said, small gifts (less than \$20) are reasonable and permitted when they serve the purpose of strengthening the relationship, celebrating a mentee or reinforcing positive habits

Failure to comply with any of these rules will be cause for halting all mentoring activity and may result in your dismissal from the BBBS program.

Thank you for fulfilling the primary role of a mentor, keeping their mentee safe and thriving.