



GUIDELINES FOR BIGS: CHILD SAFETY

Introduction

Thank you for being a Big and making a difference in the life of a child. The Big Brothers Big Sisters program wouldn't be possible without the dedication of caring volunteers like you.

Now that you are on the path to being matched and will soon be starting to spend time together with your Little, we want to take a moment to review important information about child safety. The safety of your Little and all the Littles in our program is our top priority. Spending time having fun with your Little is the heart of the BBBS program, and we want you to be well-informed about our agency's child safety guidelines and feel prepared to handle safety issues that may arise when you and your Little are together. The more prepared you are the more confident you will be and the less likely it is that you will encounter a child safety situation.

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

In addition to this guide, remember that Match Support is here to support you, your Little and your Little's guardian throughout your match and will provide ongoing guidance around ensuring your Little's safety. We always want you to feel supported on your match journey, so please don't hesitate to discuss with a Match Advocate any questions or concerns that may arise about safety issues or our child safety guidelines; that's what we're here for!

Please remember that Bigs 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 your participation as a Big.

BBBS Match Support: 617-956-0283

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

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Following School Rules

When Bigs are at a school or afterschool site, they need to follow the school's/site's safety rules. We have included some of these in this packet; however, rules may vary from site to site. If a Big has any questions about the safety guidelines at their particular site, they can reach out to the site contact or their Match Advocate for more information.

Appropriate Dress

Bigs serve as role models. Therefore, it is very important that Bigs dress appropriately while at a site. Here are some guidelines for appropriate dress, but these guidelines are not intended to cover all situations. Be mindful of the age of students at each site and what would be appropriate for them. If a Big has any questions, they should contact their Match Advocate to discuss it.

Guidelines

- No clothing with swear words or inappropriate references (such as to drinking, drugs, etc.)
- No clothing with rude or offensive jokes
- No clothing that is too revealing

Supervising a Little

Bigs are responsible for the safety and well-being of their Littles when they are spending time together. While spending time at a school or afterschool site, it is important for Bigs to keep their Littles' safeties in mind.

One guideline to remember is that the Big and their Little should spend the time at school in public spaces. These may include the gym, any outdoor playground, the cafeteria, the library, the auditorium, etc. If a match is in a space like a classroom, make sure to keep the door open. This guideline is in place to protect the Bigs; teachers and other school staff follow these same policies.

While we expect matches to spend at least half their time one-on-one, we recognize that in a school or afterschool environment, matches may occasionally interact with friends/peers for part of a Big's visit. For example, participating in a group kickball game during recess. During those times that Bigs are interacting with their Littles and their peers, remember to focus the interaction within the match. Furthermore, remember that only the Little's parents/guardians have given permission for their Big to spend time with their child. Therefore, Bigs should never be alone with other kids who are not their Littles.

It is also important that Bigs and their Littles go back to class on time. If a Little is not back to class when it begins, they are unaccounted for, which is a safety concern for teachers.

Remaining On-Site

School-Based matches are NOT permitted to meet outside of school. Matches are expected to stay at the school/afterschool site whenever Bigs are with their Littles. It is NOT okay to leave the site for any reason. If the boundaries between what is and isn't school property are confusing for a Big, please talk to a Match Advocate about this for clarity. For example, some sites have parks attached to them, and it is not okay for matches to use these parks. If Bigs are ever in doubt in the moment on-site, please consult with a school/after school staff member.

Communicating with Littles Outside of School

We encourage Bigs and Littles to keep in touch over school vacations such as winter break, spring break, and summer vacation. Matches generally keep in touch over the phone, letters, text or email. Bigs are also welcome to communicate with their Littles outside of school during the course of the year. However, Bigs must discuss this with their Match Advocates before moving forward. We need to get the Little's guardian's permission for their Big to have the Little's contact information. In the event that we cannot get permission, a Match Advocate will help the Big keep in touch with their Little over vacations, by passing letters back and forth between the match.

Health, Medications & Allergies

Bigs should not give their Littles any medications. This includes over-the-counter medications, as many adult medications are not suitable for children. If a Big is concerned about their Little's health—anything from the Little having a headache or stomachache to a scraped knee- bring them to the nurse. If there is no nurse at a site, or if the Big doesn't know where the nurse is, find an adult staff person on site to help. Make sure that the Big stays with their Little until they are helped by the proper adult.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs

Remember, Bigs are role models at all times. As such, it's important to keep in mind how Bigs' behaviors will impact Littles' safety and impressions.

Therefore:

- Illegal drug use is against the law and inappropriate at any time.
- Bigs should not drink alcohol before or during a visit with their Littles. Bigs should also not be hungover when they come to visit their Littles.
- Bigs should not smoke cigarettes, snuff, pipes, or cigars, or chew tobacco during a visit with their Littles. Using tobacco on school property is prohibited.
- Bigs should not take prescription drugs that may impair their judgments or inhibit their abilities to function normally before or during visits.

Weapons & Firearms

Any sort of weapon or firearm, ammunition, or object that could be used as a weapon (e.g. a brick, a mock gun, a laser pointer, fireworks) is strictly prohibited in the school setting. If Bigs have any questions about this, they should contact their Match Advocates.

Physical Contact & Boundaries

Children have the right to feel safe at all times. A relationship between a Big and a Little is one that requires particular focus on appropriate physical contact and boundaries because Bigs are role models and are reinforcing a healthy adult-child relationship. It is also important for Littles to develop trust with their Bigs. In thinking about physical contact and boundaries, considerations include the child's development, personal history, family dynamic and culture as well as agency guidelines. Match Support can help Bigs navigate this aspect of their friendships as it relates to each of their Littles in particular.

Appropriate and positive interactions between Bigs and Littles are essential in making each Little feel valued. Conversely, inappropriate or harmful interactions that injure a child physically and/or emotionally are strictly prohibited.

- There should be no tickling, wrestling or other physical horseplay, nor sitting in laps*
- Remember, if matches are doing athletic activities together, be aware of the Little's age and size, and do not play too rough.
- Hugs are okay **only if** initiated by the Little or with the Little's permission
- Bigs and Littles must change in separate areas (e.g. for swimming or sporting activities)
- Bigs should not physically restrain a child **except** when required in an emergency or to keep them from immediate harm.

*We recognize that Littles may tickle their Bigs, start to wrestle, or jump in their Bigs' laps at some point as these are things some kids do. If this happens, while being considerate of the Little's feelings, gently remind the Little "no tickling" or ask the Little to sit next to their Big instead. While there's no reason to overreact or treat the Little as if they did something wrong, it is important to maintain appropriate boundaries. It can be helpful to offer an alternative: high-fives, thumb wrestling or arm wrestling. If Bigs would like more help on how to approach this situation if it arises, please contact Match Support.

There should be no physical contact or interaction of a sexual nature between Bigs & Littles. It is not acceptable for Bigs and Littles to view, use or share pornography or sexually explicit materials.

Fighting Between Kids

When interacting with other students, be aware that teasing and trash talking can quickly escalate into physical fighting. If a Big is getting the sense that their Little is angry or that another kid is getting angry at their Little, encourage them to separate and take some time away from each other. If a Big is in a situation where a fight between their Little and another student(s) breaks out, it is NOT your responsibility to break it up. We don't want a Big putting themselves in danger, nor in a position of liability. Get a staff member as soon as possible to help address the situation. If a fight ends before a staff member is aware, make sure to inform a staff member at the school right away about the fight regardless, so that they can follow up with the children involved. If a Big is not sure who to talk to about this, try the Little's teacher, the site contact, or call the Match Advocate right away for advice.

After an incident like this, we encourage Bigs to follow up with their Littles. Sometimes Littles won't want to talk about a fight right after it happens, and that's okay. Bigs can wait until they are calm to discuss it, even if that means waiting until the next visit.

Helpful Tips

- Approach the conversation from the perspective of wanting to understand what happened and of wanting the Little to understand what led up to the fight.
- Don't rush into problem-solving mode and steer clear of lecturing the Little. If a Big does so, the Little may feel like their Big doesn't understand them.
- Help Little identify other constructive ways of handling similar situations in the future.
- If appropriate, talk to Little's teacher or the site contact for advice, as well as to the Match Advocate.

Secrets & Confidences

As friendships with Littles deepens and grows, Littles will grow to trust their Bigs more and more. Sometimes this leads to a little sharing personal things about their life. Bigs should never ask their Littles to keep a secret from anyone, but there may be times a Little chooses to disclose information meant to stay private. Keeping things confidential between friends is okay, unless a Big is concerned for their Little's safety or if their Little is engaging in risky behavior. Do not promise to keep secrets before knowing what the secret is. If a Big witnesses or hears from their Little about any harmful behavior or experiences, they should notify an adult at the school (such as the site contact or the Little's teacher) as well as their Match Support Coordinator right away (e.g. concerns of abuse or neglect, hurting themselves or someone else, bullying, physical altercations, use of medication without supervision, use of illegal substances, hateful or exclusionary language).

Additionally, Bigs should also always notify an adult at the school (such as the site contact or the Little's teacher) as well as the Match Support Coordinator right away if they suspect that their Little's safety is jeopardized in any way. (e.g. if a Big were to see any unusual physical marks their Little).

There may also be some cases where Littles safety could be compromised by sharing certain confidential information with others such as if a Little comes out as LGBTQ+. Bigs should talk with Match Support to get support and determine a plan to best support their Little.

When in doubt as to whether or not a Big can keep information their Little has shared confidential, err on the side of caution, assume it can't be kept confidential and talk to Match Support for guidance.

- Keeping things confidential is okay, unless there is a concern or safety issue.
- Don't promise to keep a secret before hearing what it is
- Bigs should never ask their Littles to keep a secret from anyone.

Why you shouldn't promise to keep secrets:

- Keeping safety-related information, a secret could harm a child.
- A Little's guardian is in charge of their well-being and needs to know anything related to safety concerns or risky behavior.
- If a Big must break the promise, it could harm the trust between said Big and their Little.

We don't expect Bigs to know all the answers in the moment:

- Getting caught off guard with a more challenging question is fairly common
- It is okay to be honest with a Little and let them know the big want to think about it
- Bigs can always bring up the topic again (i.e. "remember when you asked me...")

Be honest. Let Littles know about the limitations.

- Bigs can say something like “I am your friend; I want to be here for you and listen. But you need to know if you tell me something that makes me worry for you and your safety, I may need to tell someone to make sure you are okay. I want you to know that up front.”
- Bigs can try to talk to their Littles about this proactively, before an issue comes up. However, Bigs should always remind their Littles of this in the moment as these situations arise.

Helpful Tips

- Follow Little’s lead when sharing personal information. It is okay to ask questions and show care, but the Little should never feel pressured to share more than they want to share.
- Don’t rush into “problem-solving mode”. Often Littles just need a friend who will listen to them. Just because a little shares something challenging doesn’t mean they are asking their Big to fix it. It is generally wise to start by listening.
- Help a Little identify other people in their life with whom they can talk about the issue (parent, relative, school counselor, or teacher).
- If appropriate, offer to help a little talk to their guardian about the issue (practice it out, talk through potential reactions, offer advice).
- If Little says their guardian knows about the issue, follow up with Match Support so they can confirm this with Little’s guardian.

Music, Movies, & Video Games

While we do not encourage matches to do this too often, site-based Bigs sometimes may use their phones, personal laptops, or school computers to watch videos, listen to music, or play games. It is important for Bigs to ensure that they are only exposing their Littles to age-appropriate music, movies, or video games during visits since they are mentors and role models. It is a Big’s responsibility to review the content of various media to determine if it should be included in an activity. It is also Big’s responsibility to follow school rules when it comes to internet usage (see appendix A for more information; though these are Boston Public Schools guidelines, they apply to all of our sites). Please note, some sites may have additional media or cell phone usage policies that should also be adhered to- see Following School Rules above.

How to follow guidelines

- Follow the official content ratings of the media based on a Little’s age (see appendix B for more information).
- It is okay to say something like “I understand you are okay with PG 13 movies. But when I pick movies for us, I’m more comfortable if we stick with PG.”
- Be sure to let the Little know the guidelines their Big is using.
- If unsure, talk to Match Support for tailored guidance on how to handle this topic.

Connecting Safely Online

For matches who are communicating or meeting virtually (using video platforms such as Zoom, Facetime, Google Hangout/Meet/Duo, Skype, gaming sites, etc), the safety guidelines outlined in this document also apply in a digital space.

Additionally:

- Guardians should be made aware when Bigs and Littles are meeting online and join briefly at the beginning or end to touch base with Bigs.
- Big should remember that meeting online is an opportunity to role model good digital citizenship and discuss online safety with Littles.
- Recommended Resources for Online Safety:
- [Online Safety Tips for Families \(English and Spanish\)](#)
- [NetSmartz Online Safety Resources for Kids \(https://www.netismartzkids.org/\)](https://www.netismartzkids.org/)
- [Guide to Using NetSmartz](#)

Social Media:

Bigs need to protect the privacy of their Littles at all times. Social media sites, such as but not limited to, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, do not prevent the public viewing of information and pictures. Therefore, BBBSEM has established the following guidelines to help Bigs understand their obligations when sharing information online. These policies will continue to evolve and be updated as new technologies and social networking tools become available.

It is important to know that these policies complement the agency's child safety guidelines and the terms of service for the social media platforms listed above. Please note that according to most social media platform guidelines, **children under the age of 13 are not allowed to have an account.**

If a Little meets these requirements and their Big would like to connect socially, we request that the Big talk with their Little's guardian before connecting.

If a Little meets the guidelines and their guardian agrees to connect through social media, BBBSEM Volunteers should adhere to the following:

- BBBSEM volunteers are role models at all times. Many social media platforms provide options for customizing privacy settings so Bigs can edit what content their Littles can see. Please make the appropriate adjustments to photos, videos, comments, and posts to ensure that all content is appropriate and child friendly. This includes but is not limited to references of alcohol, drugs, sexualized photos or comments.
- BBBSEM volunteers should not post any personal information about their Little, such as, their full name, where they live, or descriptions of their personal or family background.
- 3. Talk to Little's guardian about what is ok to post before connecting.
- 4. Honor the confidentiality of a Little and their family when posting comments. An appropriate post would be, "Today I'm going to my Little Brother Joey's (First Name only) first Red Sox Game from @Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Massachusetts".
- 5. If you are connecting with your Little via social media, you have a responsibility as their Big to flag concerning or unsafe behavior either directly to your Little's guardian or your Match Advocate. See Secrets and Confidences section of these guidelines.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines could result in the termination of a match. If a Big is ever concerned with the information on their Little's page, please contact your Match Support Coordinator as soon as possible.

Appendix A: Boston Public School Policies: Using the Internet in School

<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/2330>

Appendix B: Ratings for Music, Movies & Video Games

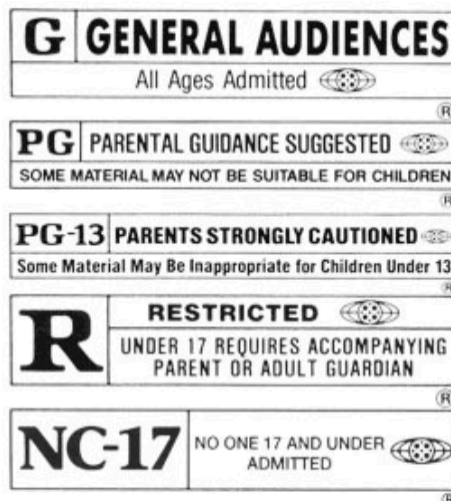
MUSIC: Parental Advisory Explicit Content

Parental Advisory Explicit Content labels on CD's are warnings that the material may not be suitable for children. More information about the warning label can be found here, <http://www.riaa.com/parentaladvisory.php>



MOVIES: Film ratings from the Motion Picture Association of America

Further guidelines can be found at <http://www.mpa.org/ratings/what-each-rating-means>.



VIDEO GAMES: ESRB Rating Symbols for Video Games

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated **EC (Early Childhood)** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE

Titles rated **E (Everyone)** have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild

EVERYONE 10+

Titles rated **E10+ (Everyone 10 and older)** have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.

TEEN

Titles rated **T (Teen)** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.

MATURE

Titles rated **M (Mature)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.

ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated **AO (Adults Only)** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.

RATING PENDING

Titles listed as **RP (Rating Pending)** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)