

General Effects: An unstable home can be the result of a number of issues: divorce, foster care, adoption, death, job loss/unemployment, moving, domestic violence, poverty, homelessness, mental illness, neglect, substance abuse, etc. A home with two employed guardians may also be unstable due to a violent and unhealthy relationship between people living in the home. A basic need of all human beings is to feel safe and protected. An unstable home places a child in an environment of fear and uncertainty, which affects development, sense of self, academic performance, behavior, social skills, etc. A child in this environment may:

- Internalize and blame themselves for the disruption or instability, suffering from low self-esteem, insecurity and depression.
- Experience anxiety, fear and a sense of unsettledness due to unpredictability and living in a constant state of chaos/change.
- Act out destructively towards self or others as this may be the only way a child knows what to expect or can have control over a situation.
- Have issues trusting new people, having previous relationships filled with broken promises and inconsistency.
- Act younger than their age or revert to babyish/childish behavior. The child is craving a sense of safety and normalcy and is attempting to gain that by acting like a child in need of protection and care.
- Constantly ask questions about the future or what will happen next, trying to prepare for what may come.
- Have trouble paying attention or struggle with schoolwork. A child who is constantly trying to figure out what will happen next is unable to concentrate on other things.
- Be 'needy' or consistently crave attention which they are unable to receive in their chaotic home life.
- Conversely, a child may have been forced to mature much faster, taking on extra responsibility due to the instability. A 'parentified child' may have difficulty relating to peers.
- Experience sleep or appetite changes due to the stress of the home environment.

Advice for Mentors:

● Show consistency and commitment.

- Express commitment to your Little in various ways. A Big may want to create a calendar with the activities the match can do every two weeks. Allowing a Little to see this will illustrate that this is long term, and show them that you are not leaving.

● Help to build a sense of connection.

- Avoid cancelling hang outs as much as possible. It is especially important to show a Little that you will not break plans and leave. This will allow them to trust you. If you do need to cancel, be sure to do it in advance and provide a Little with an alternative time to hang out. If plans change, talk to your Little about the changes in order to provide them with a good understanding of why you are saying what you are saying. By making your Little aware of the changes, they will be less likely to relate the change to a negative experience. Apologize for rescheduling and emphasize that you WANT to spend time together.

● Show your Little that you care.

- It is especially important to earn your Little's trust. A Little in this situation may be guarded. Let your Little know that they can trust you and allow a Little to open up in their own time. The best way to do this is through actions and being consistent: show up when you say you are going to! Be patient and accept your Little for who they are and where they are at in the friendship.
- Express emotions and show vulnerability. Show your Little that you are also comfortable confiding in them by expressing your feelings in an appropriate way. Accordingly, be sure to tell your Little that you are there for them and provide reassurance when needed. Act as a support system when necessary and ask your Little about their feelings in various situations. Show your Little that you are interested in maintaining this friendship.

● Low self-esteem:

- Provide a Little with compliments and positive reinforcement whenever possible. They may need that extra encouragement to really digest it. Focus on activities your Little is skilled at, pointing out when they do well.

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- Do not point out negatives. While you may need to be assertive at times, it is important to avoid overly critical language. When pointing out an issue, also point out some positive. Let a Little know that everyone makes mistakes. Focus on the positives more so than the negatives and allow your Little to see and repeat what they do well.
- It is important to be sensitive when introducing new ideas. If a Little is not successful or skilled in an area, they may feel worthless. Avoid winning/losing language and highlight the importance of learning a new skill rather than being an expert. Point out your own failures and attempts.
- ***Children need to feel safe in their environment***
 - Take a moment while on outings to ensure that your Little is comfortable with you, the location, and the activity.
 - Giving your Little a set plan for the outing may help prepare them for the day. By providing your Little with such information, it will give them a greater sense of security.
- ***Model healthy relationships.***
 - Model humility, appreciation and pride in your relationship. Be sure to express when you are wrong and apologize accordingly. Conversely, increase the amount of verbal affirmation in your relationship. Praise your Little when they do something well and show appreciation for nice gestures.
 - On rare occasions show your Little what healthy relationships look like. Maybe one time in the relationship, bring along a friend and show him how you act together. Do not make this a habit, but this may be a good one-time event to look forward to once the relationship has developed. Set a good example.
- ***Support:***
 - Respect closeness between child and guardian. Understand your role as a secondary figure. An unstable home environment leads to stress. If a child expresses frustration, be supportive and help alleviate the pressure by giving your Little the opportunity to talk about it or focusing on other enjoyable activities. Remain positive in all situations, as this will set positive examples for your Little.
 - A Little may bring up questions about an absent parent. A Big should be prepared to discuss this possibility with a guardian and determine how they would best like a big to handle a conversation. This is common and normal for a child from a single-guardian home and a Big who is prepared and comfortable with the possibility of this conversation will be able to handle it when/if it does occur.