A Toolkit & Resources for Bigs and Parents

We hope this finds you and your family doing well. These are unprecedented times.

As our nation continues to respond to the public health crisis posed by COVID-19 (Coronavirus) we have made the difficult decision to suspend all face-to-face contacts between Bigs, Littles, Families, and Program Staff.

While we have not determined how long this suspension will last, we can say this will be our policy until federal and state policies on social distancing are relaxed or ended.

During this time of change and uncertainty however, our agency’s commitment to the youth and families we serve remains the same: To collaborate with you in meeting the unmet needs of the youth and families we serve.

However, how we do this will look significantly different in the days, weeks, and months to come.

What follows is our Virtual Mentoring Guide and Toolkit, which will provide you a wide range of ways you can engage your Little, even though you will be meeting virtually rather than in person. We encourage you to review these resources and chat with your Match Specialist to help develop a plan on how best to facilitate a relationship between Big and Little.
As we said above, our approach to our work will not change.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Alabama will continue to be singularly focused on partnering with you to meet the needs of the youth we serve that may go unmet in their schools and communities.

However, as we move forward together, that work will look completely different.

With face-to-face contacts suspended, here’s how we anticipate the program will be shifting:

All Community-based mentoring will be done virtually via telephone, smart phone, social platforms, and/or video conferencing solutions.

- Matches will be no longer required to see each other for 4-6 hours each month, but Bigs will be encouraged to make weekly contacts with their Littles throughout the duration of the public health crisis.

The School-based Mentoring Program will shift to a minimum of writing letters (which is how School-based matches currently communicate over summer) and can include virtual...
communication once a Match Specialist receives completed consent forms from parent/guardians and Bigs.

- **Parent/Guardians please click the link** to indicate the level of interaction you are comfortable with.
- **Bigs please click the link** to indicate the level of interaction you are comfortable with.

**For all Matches:**

- Our Match Specialists will be providing on-going support just as they always have but will also be **focused on providing a bevy of digital resources** to help all Bigs continue to have fun supporting the needs of their Little.
- **You are still expected to make monthly contact with your Match Specialist!**
- **New Program:** We will be launching a brand-new program, **Big Neighbors**, to help meet the basic needs of our Littles and families (e.g., deliveries of groceries or prescriptions). Look below for more information on this program and for ways you can get involved!

Amidst so much turmoil and disruption, one thing is clear: **Our Little Brothers and Sisters needs us now more than ever**. We here at Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Alabama are ready and willing to provide you with the tools and resources you need to continue to provide that love, support, and guidance.
Bigs, not being able to see your Little face-to-face will present some new challenges to your relationship but following the tips below will help you navigate through these difficulties while continuing to help your Little reach their highest potential.

- Rely on regular phone calls and text messages, or video chats via FaceTime or WhatsApp to stay connected with your Little. Use this resource or this resource for great conversation starters for kids and check out this resource or this resource to get chatting with teens!
- Messenger Kids (from Facebook) is a great way to safely connect with your Little via a social media platform, while keeping their parent looped in. Here’s more on how it works.
- Snail mail - still a thing! Write letters to your Little (become pen pals), send postcards, a homemade card, pass along some print-at-home games (like these puzzles or these coloring pages), or send them a homemade craft (like these bracelets, or one of these quick/easy kids crafts)
- **STAY CONSISTENT!** Whatever way you choose to connect, your consistency is more important to your Little now more than ever. Find days, times, and methods that work best for both of you, create a plan, set a schedule, and stick to it! This will make it easier on you both, while giving you each something to look forward to and depend on.
- **ASK QUESTIONS!** It’s no surprise that everyone’s day-to-day schedule is experiencing incredible upheaval. Reaching out and chatting with your Little and their parent/guardian about when is best to reach out, what days and time are easiest, and how you can help are questions that will be enormously helpful for you (and your Little) in staying connected.
There will be many more of these to come over the coming days and weeks, but we wanted to get you started with a few Match Activity ideas that you can dive into this week with your Little!

- Develop a talent, skill, or passion together! There is a ton of experts creating exceptional online content right now that can help you and your Little learn to draw or doodle, perfect an in-home workout, practice ballet, become a scientist, explore the world, become a great cook, learn a second (or third!) language, become a yogi, or learn how to dance!
- Don’t hesitate to day-dream! Plan future activity ideas you two might do together once it’s safer to move about in the community or reconnect at school. Check out this website (type in Alabama), and this one too for great activities and attractions to check out locally.
- Have a Movie night! Plan to watch the same movie (here are some ideas) and discuss via phone or text message either during or after. Make sure to get movie selection approved by parent/guardian and here are some great questions (though you’ll have to swap the word ‘book’ for ‘movie) to get you going.
  - Looking for an educational movie or documentary? There are thousands available on Kanopy or Hoopla that are free with a library card!
- Watch a virtual concert together! There are a ton of artists who are hopping on the bandwagon and hosting virtual and free concerts for their fans! Here’s a list from NPR that might be helpful.
● Start a cooperative journal by using a platform like Story Bird or Google Docs to document the day-to-day. This example provides a great format for this.

● Have a virtual book club! You can read to your Little via FaceTime, WhatsApp Skype, or Zoom, or plan to read the same book and discuss with each other. Here are some great book ideas to get started and here’s some tips on how to get the conversation going.
  o Have a library card? Libby is a great resource for accessing downloadable free e-books!

● Schedule an activity to virtually check out a museum (or two!) or visit a zoo (or two!) together! Check out Zoom for an easy way to share your screen and explore together!

● Does your Little like to build? Purchase duplicate Lego sets or jigsaw puzzles and send one to both you and your Little. Share your progress by sending photos via text message and see who can complete their project first!

● Schedule game time! Using app-based games like Words with Friends, Draw Something, Chess (click here for the web version), Checkers, or Bowling can be great ways to engage and connect with your Little, while enjoying some down time. Check out this website (and this one too!) for great games you and your Little can play on laptops or desktops.

● Does your Little have virtual homework assignments they’re trying to tackle? Offer to lend a helping hand! Whether it’s a book report, an algebra lesson, or anything else you can be incredibly helpful in assisting your Little in transitioning to digital learning.
With school's closed across the area, we know many parents might feel overwhelmed. Bigs can help by focusing on helping stem the tide of learning loss while their Littles are spending time at home. Check out the resources below to help your Little stay sharp and continue to focus on their academics from home.

- **Baldwin County Public Schools** link to educational resources and community food sources.
- **Escambia County Public Schools** link to individual school learnings and meals for students.
- **Mobile County Public Schools** information on academic resources and feeding program sites.
- **Monroe County Public Schools** home learning resources and meals for students during school closure.
- **Khan Academy** offers a FREE library of trusted, standards-aligned practice and lessons covers math K-12 through early college, grammar, science, history, AP, SAT, and more. They are also offering daily learning schedules for kids throughout the crisis.
- **Common Sense** has a bunch of great (and free) education websites and apps that kids can access (with parent permission) to help stem the tide of learning loss. Check them out here for more info and find what resource might be best for your Little!
- **Check out Class Central** for a free list of online classes that range from computer science and business, to arts/designs and engineering. This is best for middle/high-school age Littles.
  - Feeling ambitious and want to turn this into a Match Activity? Take the class alongside your Little!
- **Is your Little interested in coding? Scratch** was designed for children ages 8-16 and uses easy-to-use programming language to let kids build almost anything they can dream. There are no obscure lines of code here. Instead, arrange and snap together Scratch blocks as if they are virtual Legos!
  - Want to turn this into a Match Activity? Use Scratch right alongside your Little and venture through their online lessons together!
- **Has there ever been a better time for podcasts? Check out this website** to access funny, smart, and scientific podcasts that keep kids engaged.
  - Want to turn this into a Match Activity? Pick a podcast you both enjoy and listen along together! Then, after each episode, connect and discuss using slightly revised, book-club style questions.
- **Do you have a teenager interested in public health or psychology? Here is a laundry list of resources** that they can explore!
  - Want to turn this into a Match Activity? Pick a resource and explore it together. Or, have your Little review a specific resource they might be excited about and teach you about what they learned!
Looking for a virtual lesson your Little (and your!) might find interesting? Check out the Take Lessons YouTube channel for lessons on singing, learning Spanish, learning sign language, playing piano, and much more!

- Want to turn this into a Match Activity? Take the lesson right alongside your Little and learn together!

Looking for online lessons that mirror what your Little might be missing in school? PBS SoCal has prepared broadcast programming and online lessons that adhere to California's K12 state curriculum, which - though definitely not Alabama - still might be helpful, informative, and fun!

- Want to turn this into a Match Activity? Take the lesson right alongside your Little and learn together!

Our friends at Scholastic offer day-by-day projects to keep kids in grades K-9 reading, thinking, and growing. These are updated each day and present four separate learning experiences, each built around a thrilling, meaningful story or video. Kids can do them on their own, with their families, or with their teachers. Just find your grade level and let the learning begin!

Is your Little interested in writing? BoomWriter inspires children to write and develop important literacy skills, and our parent app will keep you ‘In the loop’ with your child’s progress.

Can’t find something you like on the list above? Check out this website for a full list of educational companies offering free subscriptions.
We know many of our parents will be feeling the stress of supporting and providing for their children over the weeks and months to come. We wanted to be sure we have specific resources that might be helpful to pass along to parents and Bigs who may turn to each other for support:

- NPR coming through in the clutch (as always!) with this helpful, interactive guide for how to chat with kids about COVID-19.
- Comcast is offering two free months of their Internet Essentials Plan (typically $9.95/month) to support vulnerable families. This can be a great way for families to stay connect with loved ones (including you!).
- Our friends over at Common Sense have some great videos and other resources that can help families to better understand what's going in the news and how to react to it, as well as stay calm and learn at home.
- Harvard Health put together a great article on how to talk to teenagers about COVID-19.
- The Child Mind Institute outline some great resources and approaches on how to talk with younger kids about COVID-19. Here's another great article too from PBS.
- Need some family mindfulness amidst all the disruption? Ten Percent Happier has a bevy of resources and daily updates for families struggling to cope.
- Looking for activities? Here are 50 easy/cheap indoor activities to keep kids busy.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network offers an incredible COVID-19 Coping Guide with specific strategies and recommendations for each age group.

It's important for you to take care of yourself as stress levels and anxiety for many are at a high. We really like these resources:

- Greater Good's mission is to share scientific research that can help promote a happier, more compassionate society. With the recent COVID-19 outbreak, they have great stories, tips, and tools for these uncertain times in our global community. Click here for resources and articles for individuals, parents, and educators facing COVID-19.
- The website Ten Percent Happier has expanded to include the Coronavirus Sanity Guide, with articles, guided meditations, podcasts, other talks, and daily live check-ins, all for free.
As the current public health crisis continues to evolve over the coming weeks and months, we anticipate many of the families we serve will be discouraged from going into the community due to medical vulnerabilities and fear of infection. This will prevent our families from readily accessing even the most basic of day-to-day necessities.

To meet this need, we are launching **Big Neighbors**, a program designed to support under-resourced and medically vulnerable families by connecting them with the most basic necessities of everyday life.

**The Need**

We are looking for Bigs who want to lend an additional helping hand during this time of crisis by running critical errands for the families we serve. By taking a trip to the grocery store, or picking up a prescription at the pharmacy, Bigs can assist families who lack transportation and protect vulnerable families from the risks of severe infection.

**The Requirements**

- Bigs will register to lend a helping hand for a particular number of families in their immediate area.
- Bigs may be connected with the family of their Little, or other enrolled families in their local area.
- Bigs will be fully supported by their Match Specialist and the Big Neighbors Program Manager.
How to Get Involved

If you're interested in learning more, please reach out to your Match Specialist or Kelly Qualls, VP of Programs at kelly@bbbssa.org.

We have **so many ideas** for how to support you and your Little throughout the COVID-19 crisis. We are looking forward to being able to provide:

- Regular emails and text messages with resources and activity ideas
- Training on how best to practice the core tenants of Virtual Mentoring
- Training on the basics of **Zoom** and how it may be a great option to connect with and "see" your Little
- Virtual Bigs Night Out sessions so you can stay connected with your fellow Bigs

Thank you for your commitment to helping a child in need during this challenging time. For children who are isolated, fearful and maybe just plain bored right now, your consistency and support can be the difference between regression and growth. Thank you.
B BBSSA Staff Information

Aimee Risser- President and CEO
Cell: (251) 454-2233
aimee@bbbssa.org

Kelly Qualls- VP of Programs
Cell: (251) 402-2857
kelly@bbbssa.org

Beth Springle- Community-based MS
Cell: (251) 635-7064
beth@bbbssa.org

Katrina Evans- School-based MS
Cell: (251) 421-1708
katrina@bbbssa.org

Cindy Rathle – CB Match Support/SB Match Specialist for Monroe County
Cell: (251) 391-7011
cindy@bbbssa.org

Alecia Johnson- School-based MS
Cell: (251) 586-5931
alecia@bbbssa.org

Pamela Mohandessi– School-based MS
Cell: (203) 767-8744
pamela@bbbssa.org

Luann Crawford– School-based MS for Baldwin and Escambia Counties
Cell: (610) 716-1219
luann@bbbssa.org

Ian Bicko– SB Match Specialist and CB Match Support
Cell: (814) 853-5734
ian@bbbssa.org

Katherine Wildberger- Director of Development & Marketing
Cell: 251-751-1115
katherine@bbbssa.org