



## **Big Brothers Big Sisters** of Massachusetts Bay

### **Questions and Answers for Volunteers**

#### ***Me? A Big Brother or Big Sister?***

Yes, you! All you need to do is have fun with a great kid doing stuff you already do (or want to do) like: play video games, play sports, enjoy free tickets to events, wash your car, go hiking, or hanging out and laughing out loud. Whatever. You decide!

#### ***What's in it for me?***

For a few hours a month you get to be a kid again! Even better, you'll make a BIG difference in your community and in the life of a kid.

#### ***Who are the Little Brothers and Little Sisters?***

Generally, when enrolled our Little Brothers and Sisters are between 7 and 13 years of age. The one thing they all have in common is that they want a Big Brother or Sister to call their very own. Other than that, they come from all sorts of backgrounds in the [150 cities and towns](#) we serve.

#### ***How do I know I'll get along with this child?***

We get to know you first, so we can find the best Little Brother or Little Sister for you. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay matches you with a kid based on *common* interests, personality and geography. Since our Bigs are volunteers from all walks of life, we enroll and match children who can benefit from the friendship of typical caring adults rather than specialists or youth development professionals. In some geographic service areas we refer volunteers to Big Sister Association of Greater Boston or Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Boston who offer similar programs.

#### ***Can I really do this?***

Yes! If you're 18 years or older (currently, our oldest active volunteer is 80!) and can be a good, responsible friend who's willing to build a friendship over time.

#### ***I don't know much about kids—is that okay?***

You bet! Behind the scenes, you'll have a team of experts—the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay Match Support Team—cheering you on and giving helpful advice and coaching if you need it.

#### ***How much is this going to cost me?***

The cost of being Big Brother or Big Sister is nominal – other than providing your enthusiasm and some of your spare time. The focus should be on doing every day activities with your 'Little'. We often provide 'Bigs' with free tickets that they can use to

take their Little to sports, museums, cultural events, etc.. You will also receive newsletters from us that let you know about low/no-cost events happening in the community. Plus, you may be able to claim an itemized tax deduction for any out-of-pocket expenses you might incur.

***I don't have a car. Is that OK?***

Yes, we try to match volunteers who don't have cars with children living close to public transportation.

***Where can I volunteer?***

Generally, where it's most convenient to you. Near your home, your work or somewhere else where you spend time and commute to relatively easily. In any areas where we are not currently enrolling additional children, we'll ask you if you are interested in being matched with a child living in another nearby or regularly frequented community.

***How far will I have to travel?***

Usually, we like to make matches where the Big and Little are within at most 7-10 miles or up to 30 minutes by public transport. Beyond this, travel takes up too much time and this can undermine the longevity and quality of a match

***When do I meet with my Little?***

In the Community-based Program it's up to you, but most matches meet on the weekends. Bigs and Littles in the Site-based Program generally meet during weekday lunch periods or after school

***What if I'm a college student?***

We welcome any college students who plan to live locally for at least a full year. Just as with all potential volunteers we ask that applicants think realistically about whether they will be able to make a commitment of at least 12 months. The effectiveness of matches builds over time – and short term matches can be a real disappointment to a child. If you're planning to go away soon (graduation, junior year abroad, distant internship etc.), we suggest that you consider other volunteer opportunities that may not require a one-year time commitment

***What if I'm gay?***

Big Brothers Big Sisters does not discriminate based on race, sexual orientation, age or gender. We will disclose such information to the parent/guardian as part of the matching process; the parent/guardian has the option to say yes or no to the match. If they approve, we move forward with the match, if not, we work to find another little who we believe will be a good match for you.

***Do you make cross-gender matches, e.g. matching boys with women volunteers?***

No. Our programs are based on same-sex matches.

***Am I able to ask for a match with a child of any specific ethnicity, language or national origin?***

Our goal is to make matches that provide a high-quality, long term experience. Although we do not discriminate we try as best we can to take into account the preferences and interests of Bigs, Littles and parent/guardians. The more preferences an individual has the longer it may take to get them matched with a Little.

***What sort of background checks do you do?***

All volunteers and employees are subject to background checks including obtaining references from people who know them well and conducting criminal offender (CORI) and sexual offender (SORI) records checks.

***Can I volunteer even if I have a criminal record?***

We handle this on a case by case basis. It is important that you disclose this to us and address it fully. In some instances an offense may not be an obstacle because it is minor or long ago. In other instances – for example a case that is still open – it is a disqualifier. If we decide to go forward, we will always share the facts with the parent of any child we are considering as a potential match for you and they will have the final say on whether or not the match should go ahead.

***Is it useful if I speak a foreign language?***

Although not required, we are always grateful when we find volunteers who speak Spanish, Portuguese, Creole, Korean, Mandarin or Cantonese – or other languages that allow us to serve kids from immigrant communities.