



Big Brothers Big Sisters

A Path to Healthy Youth Development





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Big Brothers Big Sisters is committed to helping youth in our programs develop into healthy, thriving adults. As a Big, you can have a huge impact on your Little's educational, social, and emotional competencies, and can help him or her make choices to avoid risky behaviors. This booklet provides you an overview of how a Big like you can have a positive impact in a young person's life, especially in the area of avoiding risky behaviors. And you won't be doing it alone- Big Brothers Big Sisters Program Staff will be there to guide and support you along the way.

Shaping Attitudes Toward Risky Behaviors

Using tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, getting in trouble at school and being violent are all behaviors that can get in the way of young people's success. But how can a mentor help youth avoid potentially destructive choices?

A lot of research has shown that scare tactics are not an effective way to keep young people out of trouble. Just giving youth knowledge about negative consequences doesn't stop them from engaging in risky behaviors.

If not scare tactics, then what? Research shows that young people are able to make better choices when they believe that risky behaviors will get in the way of things that are important to them. The way that you can help as a Big is to support your Little in discovering what really matters to her and helping your Little shape a positive vision for the future. This, combined with conversations about how engaging in risky behaviors will get in the way of what your Little may want for herself, can help empower your Little to make good choices and stay on the path to healthy development.

Many young people do not yet have a clear picture of what they value or care about. They may not have developed a positive, hopeful picture of their future. They may not know how to pursue goals or have the confidence to try for things they want. Or they may simply not make the connection between positive things they want for themselves and the harmful impact of engaging in risky behaviors.

As a Big, you bring support and resources to your Little by being a positive role model, sharing your own struggles and successes, and by believing (and communicating) that your Little can have a positive, healthy future. You can help your Little expand her sense of possibility and gain confidence to see a more positive future for herself.

Building a Strong Relationship

Of course, having conversations about the future may not happen right away in a match relationship. You and your Little will first build a foundation of trust and friendship, which takes time. At the beginning, focus on the little things (like being consistent and dependable, having fun together) so that you can make a difference in the big things down the road.

Exploring Your Little's Interests, Values, & Sparks

What might your Little care about that would help him avoid risky behaviors? The key is that it has to matter to your Little—something important, like a goal or vision or plan that he values. By helping your Little identify something (or several things) that are important to him, you can work with your Little's own motivation to help shape his attitudes toward risky behaviors instead of seeming like another adult lecturing about staying out of trouble.

Early on you'll focus on helping your Little identify a Spark - a talent, interest, or hobby that motivates him to reach higher. This should help your Little get excited about the present. It may also help him develop positive dreams for the future.

Support and Barriers

Once you have identified Sparks with your Little, you can begin talking with her about what helps and what gets in the way of achieving things. You'll be able to help your Little begin to think about these supports and barriers in simple ways- by just talking about everyday accomplishments, asking how she achieved them and what could have gotten in the way. These questions set the stage for later conversations about how engaging in risky behaviors can get in the way of those things that are most important to your Little.

Adults simply telling young people that they should behave, and why, does not have a great track record of success. Although you could provide your Little with facts and stories about the negative consequences of risky behaviors, the goal is for your Little to make the connections for herself. Having identified things she cares about, you will begin to help your Little see for herself how engaging in risky behaviors will get in the way of pursuing her Spark or achieving the positive future she wants.



Talking About a Positive Future

There may come a time in your relationship when you and your Little talk not only about his immediate interest in a Spark, but also about the bigger picture. Your Little may be ready to think about his longer term future, about the kind of person he wants to be, or the kind of life he wants to live. Some Littles may be able to identify career interests or focus on completing high school or going to college.

For many Littles, developing a vision for a positive future may not yet be as tangible as college or other future goals. For your Little, his vision might be about how he'll use his Spark, what kind of person he wants to be, or the contribution he wants to make to his family or community. For many young people, not disappointing their family or making them proud is very important. Some Littles have non-family adults in their neighborhood, community, or church whose opinion they value.

The point is, you'll talk to your Little about the things that are most important to him, which will open the door to further conversations about supports and barriers – what are the things that will help or will get in the way of this positive vision?

Talking about Risky Behaviors and Strategies to Avoid Risk

You've helped your Little explore her Spark, understand the supports and barriers to her Spark, talked about her vision for a positive future and the supports and barriers to that future. Further into your relationship, you can start to talk to your Little about how risky behaviors act as barriers to growing her Spark and fulfilling her positive vision for the future. You'll want to talk to your Little about barriers that are relevant to her age and maturity– for younger Littles, "risky behaviors" may be getting in trouble at school or lying to adults, while for older Littles, they are drugs, tobacco, alcohol, skipping school, or violence.

Resource guides and Big Brothers Big Sisters staff can help you guide your Little in conversations about how risky behaviors would be a barrier to getting important things she wants in life. And as your Little begins to recognize risky behaviors as a potential barrier, you will be able to help her strategize ways to avoid risk.





Summary

Your potential to positively impact your Little starts with **building a strong relationship**, earning your Little's **trust**, and **getting to know each other**, while exploring your Little's Sparks, interests and values. Eventually, this relationship and the energy and motivation your Little gets from his Spark will allow you to talk about supports and barriers and how risky behaviors can be a barrier to pursuing his **Spark**, future **goals**, or **dreams**. This process can help your Little develop attitudes that protect him from engaging in risky behaviors that can do harm, and can help him stay on a path to a **successful** and **positive future**.





Big Brothers Big Sisters

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BigBrothersBigSisters.org

VISION:

all children achieve success in life.

MISSION:

provide children facing adversity with strong and enduring,
professionally supported one-to-one relationships that
change their lives for the better, forever.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

by partnering with parents/guardians, volunteers and others
in the community we are accountable for each child in our
program achieving:

- Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships
- Avoidance of risky behaviors
- Educational success