

TIPS FOR BIGS - CONNECTING WITH YOUR LITTLE'S FAMILY DURING *KEEP CONNECTED*

Most people who become Bigs focus on their relationship with their Little, which is appropriate. In addition, you can enrich your Little's experience, and your own, by also building a relationship with your Little's parent or guardian and other family members. The goal is not to greatly expand your time involvement, but to deepen your connection to your Little and strengthen the web of positive relationships in their life.

Keep Connected is a workshop series for Littles and their parenting adults in which they focus on strengthening relationships within their families. As they reflect on their own relationships, you also have an opportunity to reflect on your own relationship with your Little as well as learning more about your Little's life. Here are some guidelines to consider to make sure it's a valuable and positive experience for everyone.

EMPHASIZE

- **Respect the family's boundaries.** They may not be comfortable or ready to talk about some of the things they discuss during *Keep Connected*. That's their choice. You also don't have to reveal what you're not comfortable talking about.
- **Use the "talk about it" questions** to start a conversation. Share your own stories and perspectives as well, but don't argue or dominate.
- **Be curious and genuinely interested**—not to probe, but to deepen your appreciation, understanding, and relationship. If you ask your Little's family to open up, you'll need to open up in a similar way.
- Encourage your Little's family to **come up with their own solutions** to challenges, rather than trying to solving their problems for them or offering quick fixes.
- **Reinforce the family's own relationship goals and priorities** that emerge through *Keep Connected*. Follow up on how they're doing. If they lose track, ask how you might get started again together.
- **If you get concerned about any part of your relationship** with the family or their expectations, check in with your BBBS agency contact. You will benefit from their perspective and experience.

AVOID

- **Don't give up if it doesn't go well at first.** Some families may have had difficult experiences with mentors and others outside their family, so it may take a while to build trust. Give it time.
- **Work to overcome implicit or subtle biases** you may have regarding different families based on their income, composition, race or ethnicity, or other differences. (They may also have biases about you.) Take time to get to know them individually that break through preconceptions.
- **Resist giving advice.** Only offer it when asked. Then keep it short, ask for feedback, and only continue when encouraged.
- **Avoid assuming that what worked for you** in another time, place, or situation will also work for your Little's family.
- **Don't try to meet all the family's needs** or to become their social worker. Your role is to establish a stronger, trusting relationship, and you may connect them with other resources. But put limits on the family's expectations, and check with the BBBS agency contact if you're not sure.