

What is Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Ocean State?

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Ocean State is a mentoring organization that serves children ages 7 to 15 from across Rhode Island who are at highest risk for substance abuse, school failure, early parenting, and violence; those living in high-risk environments such as dangerous neighborhoods or isolated rural settings, or who come from families facing challenges such as major mental illness, life-threatening or chronic disease, poverty, addiction, and domestic violence.

Is Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Ocean State affiliated with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America?

Yes. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is our parent organization and they've been serving youth nationally for more than a 100 years. Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Ocean State continues that tradition by matching volunteer mentors with children facing adversity, to enable them to realize their full potential.

Does the program work?

Yes! Mentoring has been identified as the single most effective means of positively influencing the future of a child. In fact, local outcomes for Littles mentored by a Big are impressive:

- 82% showed improved self-confidence
- 79.8% were better able to express their feelings
- 66.3% developed better decision-making skills
- 63.1% improved their academic performance

Our goals are simple—to develop caring, confident, and competent children who stay in school, off drugs, and out of trouble, by matching them with the caring, consistent, safe role models they need.

What does “facing adversity” mean?

The children we serve are at the highest risk for substance abuse, school failure, early parenting, and violence, because they come from families facing challenges such as poverty, incarceration, addiction, illness, or domestic violence.

Children at-risk are those whose prospects for a bright future may be dimmed due to a variety of influences. According to the US Census Bureau, six “factors that influence family fragility and children’s prospects” for future success are as follows: child is not living with two parents; child is living with parent(s) not having steady, fulltime employment; family income is below the poverty line; household head is high-school dropout; child does not have health insurance; family is receiving welfare benefits. Nationally, millions of children experience two or more risk factors; and when four or more risk factors are experienced 26 percent will drop out of high school and 16 percent will become teen parents.

Who are the Little Brothers/Little Sisters?

The "Littles" are children from our community who can benefit from having a positive role model. Children may be referred to the program by their parent/guardian, school, other agency, or church.

Most children are from one-parent families. All are in need of a friend—someone to laugh with, talk to, learn from and to share those simple moments that make being a child fun.

How old do you have to be to volunteer as a Big?

It depends on the program. Adults age 19 or older, may volunteer in the Community-Based Programs. Age 18 and older, may volunteer in Site-Based Programs.

Are there any additional requirements?

If you are driving on your visits with your Little, you must have a valid driver's license and liability insurance.

How are Bigs and Littles matched?

Our match support program coordinator spends considerable time getting to know our volunteers and our waiting children in order to make the best possible match. Littles and Bigs are matched on the basis of personality, common interests, the child's needs and the volunteer's strengths.

What do Bigs and Littles typically do together?

Just about anything they both enjoy. Bigs are friends, and with a friend you can play sports, watch a movie, bake cookies, hike, do school work, wash the car, volunteer in the community, or just sit and talk. Additionally, the agency provides one free group match activity per month that you and your Little may participate in if you like.

How much time does it take to be a Big?

Bigs in the community-based program typically spend a few hours a week a few times a month (6-8 hours/month) for at least one year building a friendship with a child. Bigs in the site-based mentoring program spend one hour a week during the academic year with a child at their school or other agency-designated site.

Does it cost a lot of money to be a Big?

No. The emphasis is on spending quality time together not on entertainment. The simplest activities are often the most fun. It is important to enjoy activities that build your friendship and provide opportunities for learning and having fun. The greatest gift you have to give is yourself and your time.

Is there any training/support for volunteers?

Each volunteer is provided with an orientation prior to being introduced to their Little. A match support program coordinator is assigned and is available to answer questions or provide additional training and resources for concerns of particular interest to your match. Your coordinator will provide support throughout your match relationship, and will touch base with you, your Little, and the Little's parent/guardian regularly.

What is the screening process to become a Big?

All volunteers are carefully screened to help ensure that the relationship with the child will be safe and rewarding for everyone. Prospective volunteers are screened through an application, background checks, character references, and personal interview. All information is confidential.

Will I really make a difference?

Probably more than you will ever know. Formal research shows that children in matches that last at least one year are less likely to begin using alcohol and drugs, less likely to be involved in acts of violence, do better in school, and get along better with their peers and family.