



**Big Sister Association**  
of Greater Boston

*Little Moments. Big Magic.™*

# The TEAM Group Mentoring Program

## **Volunteer Training and Resource Manual**

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# **“Little Moments. Big Magic.”**

## **Volunteer Training and Resource Manual Objectives**

The TEAM volunteer training and resource manual is designed to both prepare and support you in having a positive group mentoring experience. This manual contains information to help you:

- Understand how the TEAM program is in direct alignment with Big Sister Association’s overall mission.
- Gain a greater understanding of the TEAM program’s philosophy, values and desired outcomes.
- Gain an enhanced understanding of female adolescent development and the power of groups.
- Understand your role as a TEAM Big Sister.
- Build effective relationships with Little Sisters in group.



## About Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

*Cultivating confidence, competence and caring in Greater Boston's girls*

**Confidence...** Big Sister empowers girls to believe there is no limit to what they can dream, do and achieve.

**Competence...** Big Sister invests girls with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions for themselves and their futures.

**Caring...** Big Sister encourages girls to develop authentic relationships based on kindness, trust and respect.

Since 1951, Big Sister has been helping girls reach their full potential through positive mentoring relationships with women. Big Sister is the largest mentoring organization in Greater Boston exclusively serving girls. We offer two one-to-one mentoring programs, Community-Based and School-Based, and two group mentoring programs, TEAM (Team Enhanced Approach to Mentoring) and *Life Choices*, all of which are specifically designed to acknowledge, address and affirm girls' innate strengths and unique perspectives.

### **Our Little Sisters:**

Big Sister matches girls ages 7 to 15 in 69 cities, towns and communities in Greater Boston. Little Sisters come from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures and family situations. All of our girls have one thing in common: they all desire the friendship of an adult mentor.

### **Our Big Sisters:**

Our Big Sisters are women like you! Big Sisters come from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures and family situations. Their most important qualities are that they are enthusiastic, compassionate and willing to share their time with a girl.

### **Our Partners:**

Big Sister is a proud affiliate of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. We could not offer the depth of programs and activities that we do without the generosity of our partners. Big Sister has partnered with a number of local corporations that allow employees to volunteer during the workday, as well as colleges which encourage their students to give back. In addition to our corporate and academic partners, we collaborate with other social service organizations, groups and affinity clubs in order to further our work.

## WHY GIRLS NEED MENTORS

Girls in Greater Boston and across the nation face tremendous risk factors as they navigate their pre-teen and teenage years. Among them, we see alarming levels of depression, suicide, eating disorders, drug use, pregnancy and violent crimes. Data compiled in 2003 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Survey of girls in Boston, grades 9-12, highlights the distinct challenges facing Boston girls today:

- ◆ 16.1% of girls in Boston reported drinking five or more drinks in a sitting at least once in the past 30 days; 27.7% reported drinking alcohol before age 13; and 7.3% reported trying marijuana before age 13;
- ◆ 24.3% of girls in Boston reported having been offered, sold or given drugs at their school at least once in the past twelve months; 5.6% reported feeling so unsafe at school that they did not attend at least once in the past 30 days; and 11.3% reported having been in a physical fight at school at least once in the past twelve months;
- ◆ 6.9% of girls in Boston reported vomiting or using laxatives to lose weight at least once within the past 30 days; 16.8% reported not eating for 24 hours to lose weight at least once in the past 30 days; and 13.1% were categorized as overweight, while 34.1% reported thinking they were overweight;
- ◆ 11.2% of girls in Boston reported receiving mostly D's or F's on their most recent report card; and
- ◆ 17.2% of girls in Boston reported seriously contemplating suicide at least once in the past twelve months and 9.1% attempted suicide at least once in the past twelve months.

Additionally, juvenile delinquency continues to be a problem in Greater Boston and **it is not just boys entering the juvenile justice system but an increasing number of girls as well.** According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, between January 1992 and January 2004, the number of girls in the juvenile committed population increased by 279%, while the number of males increased by only 71% (Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Data and Information, 2004).

These distressing statistics underscore the need for programs that can help Boston girls counteract risk factors in their lives and Big Sister's mentoring programs can help girls to do just that. According to the Children's Defense Fund (State of America's Children: 2005), "Mentoring programs are invaluable community-based efforts, linking at-risk youths with adults who serve as role models and are trained to know when to refer youths to other community resources for needs they cannot address. These programs keep children from getting into trouble and pull children out of trouble." **Both our own evaluations and independent research have proven that girls who participate in our programs experience many positive outcomes, including: improved academic performance and decision-making skills; increased self-esteem; improved relationships with family and peers; and improved ability to avoid substance abuse.**

## WHY GIRLS NEED GENDER-SPECIFIC MENTORING

Despite the fact that girls' needs and risk factors differ substantially from boys', research shows that few coed youth programs actively address the needs of girls. In a recent study, the Public Education Network examined a variety of youth programs offered by community-based organizations across the country and found that, *"In many coeducational settings, especially former boy-serving organizations gone coed, girls seem like afterthoughts... We found both an absolute level of underservice to girls overall in communities, and too many instances of girls being treated as second-class citizens in coeducational programs"* (Public Education Network, 2000). Locally, the story is the same. **In her study of coed youth programs in Greater Boston, Molly Mead concluded that many coed programs were more popular with boys, placed the needs and interests of boys above girls, and were better designed for boys** ("Where are the Girls?": A Report Developed by the Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston, 2006).

**However – Mead found that when youth-serving programs focus solely on girls' needs, as Big Sister's mentoring programs do – girls will thrive.** In their 2000 report on girls' programs in Boston, Mead and the Young Sisters of Justice, outlined the specific benefits of single-sex programs for girls, which hold true for our programs:

- ◆ *Girl-focused programs are designed with girls' experiences and strengths in mind;*
- ◆ *These programs help girls recognize the inequities they face in the world and help them to develop strategies to overcome them;*
- ◆ *Girls learn to respect themselves and each other;*
- ◆ *Girls learn about different roles women can play in their families, communities and in the workplace;*
- ◆ *Girls learn to develop positive relationships with adult women;*
- ◆ *Girls learn the importance of connecting with other girls and focusing on issues of joint concern.*

In essence, girl-focused programs help give girls the skills and confidence they need to work towards a richer, more vibrant future for themselves.

There are also other factors that make single-sex mentoring programs more beneficial for girls. According to research recently released by Katia Fredriksen and Jean Rhodes, professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts – boys and girls tend to form and view relationships very differently. Girls' relationships are more likely than boys to be founded upon intimacy and the sharing of feelings, and girls are more likely than boys to seek support from friends when they are troubled. Because of this, boys and girls require different types of relationships with their mentors, and mentors have to be adequately prepared for this. Such gender differences are not often addressed when adults are trained to be mentors in co-educational programs, diminishing the likelihood that women will be able to build strong relationships with the girls' they are matched with.

However, Big Sister, provides our mentors with comprehensive training that prepares them for the responsibility they are about to undertake, and which explores the physical, social, emotional, sexual and mental characteristics of girls. As a recent study observed, *"girls need and want mentoring relationships with older girls and women that offer them accessible role models to emulate and learn from"* (Ms. Foundation for Women, 2001). The special friendships Big Sister fosters between girls and women not only have a positive effect on the girls themselves, but also have a positive effect on their families and communities, further supported by a Ms. Foundation report, which states that intergenerational relationships between women and girls are, *"key in nurturing girls' leadership and activism and for developing girls as community assets."*

## **Why Groups for Adolescent Girls?**

It's been well documented that adolescent girls respond positively to group work and that participation in a group often serves as a protective factor in teen girls' lives.

“Group work is an indispensable method for helping children to meet the developmental tasks and navigate the changing currents of adolescence.” (Malekoff, 1997)

- ◆ Developmental tasks of adolescence
  - separating from family
  - developing a moral system
  - forging a healthy sexual identity
  - preparing for the future
  - building social skills
- ◆ Peer groups are very important to adolescents - they like being with other youth and use their peer group to build social skills and learn from each other
- ◆ Group work decreases the alienation and isolation of adolescence through mutual aid

We know that as girls enter adolescence, peer relationships become increasingly more important, as well as increasingly more conflictual. Groups allow us to interact with adolescent girls in a way that is developmentally appropriate for them.

For adolescents to become healthy and constructive adults they must find ways to reach the following goals:

- ◆ Find a valued place in a constructive group
  - ◆ Learn how to form close, durable human relationships
  - ◆ Feel a sense of worth as a person
  - ◆ Achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices
  - ◆ Know how to use support systems available to them
  - ◆ Find ways of being useful to others
  - ◆ Believe in a promising future with real opportunities
- (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995)

“In order for the goals identified above to be reached, young people need safe places to go, worthwhile things to do, a sense of belonging, a sense of competence, a feeling of hope, and support from adults who understand how to help make all this happen.” (Malekoff, 1997)

## **Adolescent Development**

<b>Young Adolescents...</b>	<b>Therefore they need...</b>
undergo rapid physical, social, emotional and intellectual changes.	to explore who they are and what they can become.
change at different rates, according to highly individual “internal clocks.”	diverse activities that can appeal to a wide range of skills and interests.
grow more rapidly than at any other time in their lives since birth.	lots of physical activity – not stressful competition – and time for relaxation, too.
develop secondary sex characteristics and the capacity to reproduce.	accurate information and guidance about sexuality.
can be painfully self-conscious and critical. They are defining themselves, and they vary widely in maturation and ability.	many opportunities to achieve and to have their competence recognized by others.
seek limited independence and autonomy. They may imagine themselves to be invulnerable to negative risks.	adult guidance in setting limits, but they should be allowed to help make the rules within those guidelines.
identify with the peer group; they want to belong, and they are developing deeper friendships.	opportunities to form positive relationships and experiences with peers.
develop new talents, energies and feelings.	outlets for creative expression.
identify more maturely with their race, gender and potential for employment.	relationships with diverse adult role models.
are idealistic about social and religious issues.	to participate meaningfully in their communities.
are at a uniquely vulnerable time in their lives.	reassuring and informed adults – and a more caring society.

From “*Common Focus: An exchange of information about early adolescence*, volume 5, number 2, 1983.  
Center for Early Adolescence, Carrboro, NC.



## ***Mentoring Works! What the Research Says:***

In 2006, the Donahue Institute at UMass Boston completed a landmark study on the effectiveness of mentoring programs:

### **Research Conclusion:**

“A majority of youth in this study report that meeting with their mentors and involvement in the mentoring programs have had positive impacts in terms of increasing youth development, reducing negative or high risk behaviors, and improving school behavior.”

### **Sampling of survey responses:**

*Girls reported that the TEAM group helped “a lot” or “a little” in the following areas:*

- ❖ 80.7% - feel better about talking with people they don’t know very well
- ❖ 74.3% - feel more confident about the future
- ❖ 74.2% - feel more self-confident
- ❖ 70.6% - stop or decrease getting into trouble outside of school
- ❖ 69.2% - control anger
- ❖ 66.7% - stop or decrease getting into trouble at school
- ❖ 66.6% - stop or decrease smoking, drinking or other drugs
- ❖ 53.0% - learn to get along with parent(s)/guardian(s)

### **When asked how the time spent with mentors helped them, girls stated:**

“It helped me get along with people more.”

“It helped me because it taught me to learn how to trust people more.”

“It taught me to become more confident and that sometimes it’s ok to laugh at yourself and to just have fun.”

“It helped me not to judge people on their appearance and that as girls we have power that we didn’t notice. Everything in life is our choice. So we make our own decisions.”

### **When asked what the most positive thing about the mentoring experience was, the mentors stated:**

“...the relationships we were able to build as a group. I’m proud of how close we were able to get. I learned about the girls in their age group and about myself.”

“...the impact we had on the girls, and in turn, the impact the girls had on me.”

“The most positive thing about this mentoring experience for me was watching the girls voluntarily attend the group each week and really become comfortable with sharing personal things with the group. It’s such a positive thing for them to have a safe space to talk.”

“...watching the girls believe more in themselves through feeling part of something and through connections with others.

## **TEAM Philosophy**

Girls today are faced with many difficult decisions that often seem overwhelming. The purpose of the TEAM program is to provide adolescent girls with a safe, consistent space where they can constructively explore choices and challenges with caring adult female mentors and with each other.

We encourage our TEAM Big Sisters to keep the values of the program in mind as they interact with their Little Sisters.

## **TEAM Values**

- ◆ **Authenticity** – a commitment to being genuine, to being yourself:
  - What does authenticity look like in a group?
  - What are some indicators of authenticity?
  - Give examples of times you have observed authenticity.
  - What does someone being unauthentic look like?
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?
- ◆ **Acceptance** – a commitment to holding a non-judgmental stance, to letting the Littles know that we appreciate them for who they are:
  - What does acceptance look like in a group?
  - Give examples of times you have observed acceptance or worked to demonstrate it
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?
- ◆ **Engagement** – a commitment to being an **active** participant, both in the building of relationships and in group activities and discussions. A commitment to being present, responsive and involved:
  - What does engagement look like in group?
  - Is there such a thing as being negatively engaged?
  - What do we mean by active participant?
  - How do you show you are present, responsive and involved?
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?
- ◆ **Respectful Curiosity** – a commitment to express interest in others as a way to foster positive relationships, to help Littles feel both valued and important. To help model and foster critical thinking skills by asking questions and maintaining a stance of curiosity
  - What does respectful curiosity look like in group?
  - Give examples of times you have observed respectful curiosity or worked to demonstrate it.
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?

- ◆ **Playfulness** – a commitment to having fun, finding humor where we can, and laughing together:
  - What does playfulness look like to you?
  - What do you do to demonstrate playfulness?
  - How do you help girls engage in playful connections?
  - What if you are not a playful person by nature?
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?
  
- ◆ **Sisterhood** – a commitment to building and sustaining positive, empowering relationships among females:
  - What does sisterhood look like in a group?
  - How do you demonstrate sisterhood and get buy in from group members?
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?
  
- ◆ **Flexibility** – a willingness to “go with the flow,” to make adjustments in the agenda, to meet Little Sisters where they’re “at” and to address their most pressing needs:
  - What does flexibility look like in a group?
  - What does it mean to be flexible in a group?
  - What are your obstacles to expressing this value?

## Role of a TEAM Big Sister:

- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters are *active participants* in the group. They follow the group facilitator's lead, come to the group ready to participate in activities and discussions and share their thoughts and opinions in the group.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters reinforce the message that girls matter by warmly welcoming Little Sisters to the group, noticing their presence (or absence), celebrating their uniqueness and encouraging their voices.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters consistently reinforce the message that their Little Sisters **always have choices and that their decisions matter** (it's one of our mantras!).
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters bring their “whole selves” to the group. They mindfully share stories or information about themselves with group members in an effort to build trusting, supportive relationships.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters guide Little Sisters' critical thinking processes and identify and explore options with them.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters help Little Sisters build their confidence and realize their self worth by getting to know all group members, interacting positively and helping the Little Sisters see themselves in a positive light.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters identify and celebrate strengths in their Little Sisters.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters positively challenge group members to help them think through their decisions and experiences.
- ◆ TEAM Big Sisters are REAL women, as well as positive role models. They are women that their Little Sisters will grow to admire while also being accessible and real.

## Expectations of TEAM Big Sisters

### *Outside of group*

Communicate with your group facilitator:

- Manage your personal schedule throughout the course of the group
  - ◆ Be mindful of your schedule throughout the entire duration of the group (October – May). Consistency is the *most important part* of being a TEAM Big Sister
  - ◆ Check e-mail/voicemail routinely and respond to messages left by the group facilitator
  - ◆ Give your group facilitator as much notice as possible if you will be late or absent from group so that she may plan the group content accordingly and prepare girls for your absence or late arrival
  - ◆ Be mindful of the impact your absence might have on the group
  - ◆ Write the group a note or send a postcard if you will miss more than one session in a row and prepare girls for your absence
- Take advantage of your group facilitator to ask questions or to bounce ideas and thoughts off of her. Remember – you are not expected to “know everything”

### *During Group Session*

Be an active TEAM Big Sister:

- Understand the group process; your group facilitator can help you with this.
- Understand the behavior of your Little Sisters
  - ◆ Talk to your facilitator for support around challenging behaviors
  - ◆ Respond to challenging behaviors with feedback to the group about how the behavior is affecting your own experience as well as the group as a whole
- Provide support to Little Sisters around challenging interactions and topics, and voice your own thoughts and opinions
- Make meaning out of seemingly small successes and tell the girls when you notice those small successes
- Build relationships with Little Sisters

Work as a team with other mentors in the group:

- Provide feedback to other Bigs and to your facilitator; invite feedback from others
- Build relationships with other Bigs and the facilitator
- Help the group facilitator assess individual learning styles, challenges and needs of Little Sisters
- Alert group facilitator if something comes up that is concerning to you
- Lead small groups in activities and discussions with Little Sisters



- Actively participate and be spontaneous
- Celebrate and identify
  - ◆ Strengths of individual members
  - ◆ Strengths of the group as a whole
  - ◆ Differences/similarities among members
  - ◆ Group as a cohesive entity with a shared history

#### *After group session*

- Allow time after each session to “debrief” with your group facilitator. This is your time to talk about how you thought the session went, touch base about any interactions you had with girls and get feedback on how to handle different scenarios

#### *Other responsibilities*

- Attend the mid-year meeting with your group facilitator and other Big Sisters, the TEAM appreciation event and the end of year meeting with your group facilitator and other Big Sisters

## Expectations of Group Facilitators

### *Outside of group*

#### Liaison with Site Contact

- Manage logistics throughout the course of the group
  - ◆ Recruitment/Orientation/Permission Slips/Parental follow-up
  - ◆ Group room availability
  - ◆ Coordination of Field Trip
  - ◆ Recommendations for additional supports that may be needed from the site
- Routine check-in and support around girls
- Pulse of school climate – communicate about pertinent events/information

#### Provide ongoing support to Big Sisters

- Help Big Sisters feel prepared for each group session
- Understand the group process
- Understand the behavior of Little Sisters
- Provide support around challenging interactions and topics
- Make meaning out of seemingly small successes
- Provide feedback to Big Sisters/invite feedback from Big Sisters

### *During Group Session*

#### Relationship Coach

- Foster connections between Little Sisters
- Foster connections between Little Sisters and Big Sisters
- Foster connections between Big Sisters
- Foster connections between facilitator and all group members

#### Cruise Director

- Provide Snack/Supplies
- Assessment of individual learning styles, challenges and needs
- Design, present and lead group in activities and discussions
- Encourage all members to actively participate and to be spontaneous

#### Cheerleader

Celebrate and identify:

- Strengths of individual members
- Strengths of group as a whole
- Differences/similarities among members
- Group as a cohesive entity with a shared history



## **What Little Sisters had to say about their TEAM experience:**

“It was great! I felt like I could share anything with the Big Sisters, and I could feel confident.”

“It felt good because I like talking to older people who keep it between me and them. It was cool to have people to confide in.”

“It was wonderful. I have real big sisters but I don’t talk to them about these things. It was exciting to have people to talk to who are not my mom.”

“I learned to respect people when they talk and how to express myself.”

“I learned that even if you’re not the same you still can be friends.”

“I felt like someone cares.”

“I think that this group is the best thing that happened to me this year.”

## **What Big Sisters had to say about their TEAM experience:**

“[My TEAM experience was] excellent – the girls moved from being self-focused to a team spirit. The group members were bright with a lot of energy. They kept me on my toes!”

“TEAM taught me how to communicate with younger girls and how important it is to build relationships.”

“[TEAM was] challenging in good ways—I had to confront biases and weaknesses in myself. Lively! Much laughing. A totally unique experience very different from my usual routine. I loved that.”

“I did not expect to have as much fun and laugh as much as I did!”

“Being a Big Sister is part of my identity because I truly feel that I was a sister and friend to each and every girl in our group. I didn’t do this to add another activity to my resume but to be there as a role model, mentor and friend to a special group of girls.”



## Building Bridges as a Big Sister: Addressing Differences

*The relationship between Big Sisters and Little Sisters is a special opportunity to learn about other individuals— both similarities and differences— while creating a special friendship.*

- ❖ The qualities that you possess as a Big Sister are what matters most. You and your Little Sisters may come from different racial, cultural, socioeconomic and/or religious backgrounds, however, in spite of those differences, there is tremendous potential for connection. Your skills, warmth, personal experience and shared interests with your Little Sisters, as well as a capacity to provide sensitive support and an openness to the nuances of cultural differences are what matter most in building positive, trusting relationships.
- ❖ Differences can create opportunities for Big Sisters and Little Sisters to learn and grow. As you continue to get to know each other, you will share and learn about each other's cultures, traditions and personalities, which can be enriching for both Big Sisters and Little Sisters.
- ❖ People generally feel strongly about their values, although they may find them difficult to talk about. Values are general principles that are of fundamental importance to an individual—such as equality, tolerance, honesty, privacy, security or education. Mentoring relationships can offer the opportunity to learn about your Little Sisters' values and share some of your own, while remaining open and non-judgmental.
- ❖ Remember that you can provide support to your Little Sisters even if you haven't had similar experiences. Let your Little Sisters be the expert on their own experiences and tell you what they want to tell you. Approach these conversations with openness and curiosity and listen intently.
- ❖ Be yourself. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we try to relate to young people by using their slang or dressing like them. Little Sisters can see through this and may find it difficult to trust people who are not being themselves.
- ❖ It's important to go back to a conversation if you feel you have missed an opportunity to support your Little Sisters or share a new or different perspective.
- ❖ Your Big Sister group facilitator is here to help support your match. Talk to your group facilitator if it seems as if any differences between you and your Little Sisters are getting in the way of you building relationships. She can help you think through what's getting in the way and help you strategize how to approach it or talk about it with your Little Sisters.

## Communicating with Your TEAM Little Sisters

Effective communication is a skill. Communicating with teens is much different than communicating with adults. You can set the tone in the relationship by listening and talking with your Little Sisters in a manner that lets them know that what they have to say is important to you. Listening may be the most important communication skill a mentor can possess.

### Tips for Effective Communication:

- Pay attention, stay in the moment
- Maintain eye contact (but be aware that not all Little Sisters will feel comfortable with a lot of eye contact; in some cultures, it is considered disrespectful for young people to look their elders in the eye)
- Listen for the whole message (is there something she is trying to tell you that she isn't saying with words?)
- Ask for clarification if you are unsure of what you are hearing
- Do not interrupt or finish your Little Sisters' sentences
- Do not rehearse your response
- Use "kid friendly" language – try to use vocabulary that they will understand; invite the girls to ask for clarification if they don't understand something you've said; check in to see if they understand
- Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements. For example: "I get confused when you talk so fast. Can you slow down a little?" instead of "You talk too fast, I can't understand you!"
- Make suggestions or ask questions, instead of giving direct orders
- Be clear and selective in giving advice. Allow your Little Sisters to develop their own opinions and sense of judgment. For example: "I'm happy to share my thoughts but I'd really love to hear what you think about this situation first"
- Use open rather than closed statements; an open response lets a child know that you acknowledge what she is saying and feeling. This type of response lets your Little Sisters know that you are trying to understand. For example, a Little Sister says, "I hate school... it's awful and it's way too hard."
  - **Open** response: "It sounds like school has got you down right now... what's going on?"

- **Closed** response: “School isn’t awful. It’s fun. You should like school!”
- Keep your sense of humor, HAVE FUN and be silly!
- Create an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and acceptance
- Avoid talking to Little Sisters like a peer; be mindful of the amount of personal information you share
- Sometimes we may feel the need to “fix” or take care of a problem; what your Little Sisters may need is merely to be heard and understood
- Provide words of encouragement – “way to go,” “thanks for your help,” “that’s terrific,” “you really know how to show that you care,” “you all did a great job of being patient with each other” etc...
- Learn to deal with silence. Your Little Sisters may not always be in the mood to talk and that’s okay. It is important to be flexible and tolerate the quiet times
- Use “*what if*” questions to find out how your Little Sisters might solve a problem. Asking your Little Sisters “what if” questions gives them a chance to problem-solve and think ahead about how to cope with some of life’s unexpected problems. It also takes you out of the position of having to know all the answers
- Non-verbal communication is just as important as verbal communication. A smile, a frown, having your back to your Little Sisters when they are talking to you or the tone of your voice communicates whether you are listening and interested. Eye contact with your Little Sisters is the best way to let them know that you do want to listen. Studies indicate that 60 percent of communication is through body language, 30 percent through tone of voice and only 10 percent through the actual content of what is said.

## The Strengths Perspective

**Definition:** A focus on what is working rather than what is not; to actively build upon what is working.

**Some examples:**

1. Some of my Little Sisters come into group and don't say hello or seem all that interested in getting to know me.

*My Little Sisters are good at pacing themselves at the beginning of relationships until trust and consistency are firmly established.*

2. My Little Sisters have a hard time sitting down and having a discussion without interrupting whoever is talking.

*My Little Sisters are so excited to share their opinions and thoughts that they have a hard time containing their enthusiasm.*

3. My Little Sisters ask me and the other Bigs a lot of very personal questions about private topics.

*My Little Sisters are curious about us, want to connect and see if we are the kind of adults that can handle taboo subjects in which they may need some direction.*

4. There are a set of Little Sisters that only sit and talk with each other and don't try to connect with any of the other group members.

*There is a set of Little Sisters who feel comfortable and safe being with their already established friends; they're providing each other with support in a new situation that can feel awkward or nerve-racking.*

5. There are some Little Sisters who come in and don't say anything throughout all of group and don't respond to my attempts to engage them.

*There are some Little Sisters who passively participate in group and take their time building their readiness to more actively participate in group.*



A strengths-based approach to dealing with girls' challenging behavior communicates hope and a belief in their ability to change and "do better". It sends the message that "I believe in you".

### **Pejorative Label**

Obnoxious  
Rude, Arrogant  
Resistant  
Manipulative  
Close-mouthed  
Stubborn, Defiant  
Promiscuous  
Looking for Attention

Lazy, Uninvested

### **Strengths-Based Reframe\***

Good at pushing people away  
Good at affecting people, expressive  
Cautious  
Good at getting her needs met  
Loyal to family and friends  
Good at standing up for herself  
Desperately looking for love and attention  
Good at caring about and loving herself;  
everyone needs attention and to feel like  
they matter  
Good at protecting herself from potential  
hurt

\*Adapted from Charlie Applestein, "The Glass Ain't Half-Full, It's Overflowing." Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Mentoring Program, Regional Training, 2006.

*"The people who helped me the most were the ones who told me:  
'What is right with you is more powerful than anything that is wrong with you!'"*  
*A Resilient Young Person*

## **STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT**

Based on *The Boston Model*

### **I. BEGINNING**

- Assessing situation (“What is this?” “Do I want to be part of this?”)
- Checking out leader and mentors (“Who are they?” “Will they like me?”)
- Clarifying purpose and roles (“What are we doing here?”)
- Contracting – creating shared commitments
- Creating groundwork for safety and connection  
Consistency and predictability

### **II. POWER & CONTROL**

- Feelings of safety and comfort grow
- Testing of status, leaders, power, choices (“Can you really stick in there?”)
- Sub-groups often form
- Scapegoating
- Leader and mentors may feel frustrated, exhausted, angry
- Leader’s role is to permit rebellion, normalize, maintain safety, allow members a degree of control over group, be NON-PUNITIVE

### **III. INTIMACY**

- Openness and trust – increased risk-taking and sharing
- Group identity develops (“This is our group”)
- Significance of group experience
- Leaders/mentors can have an impact here, can comment on behaviors

### **IV. DIFFERENTIATION**

- More accepting – group members feel more comfortable challenging *each other* in new ways
- See leader and mentors as individuals
- Girls can reflect on group, “Group helps us,” can see changes in behaviors

### **V. TERMINATION**

- Different for all groups
- Often see regression, can be chaotic
- “Why can’t we keep going?”
- Denial, anxiety, anger
- Name the feelings, normalize
- Review the significance of the group
- Remember celebrate progress and experience
- Look to the future

## Hopes and Fears

### BIG SISTER

#### HOPES

I'll feel comfortable and part of the group  
The girls will trust me  
We'll have fun  
I'll make a difference  
We'll have things in common  
Little Sisters will talk and share  
I'll learn new things  
It will be manageable with my schedule  
I'll get support from my leader and other Big Sisters  
I'll be able to handle a variety of situations

### LITTLE SISTER

#### HOPES

We'll have fun  
The Big Sisters will be "cool"  
The Big Sisters will believe what I say  
The Big Sisters will listen to me  
The Big Sisters will teach me new things  
The Big Sisters will help me with my problems  
The Big Sisters will accept me for who I am  
The Big Sisters will care about me  
One of them will become my Big Sister after the group is over

### AGENCY

#### HOPES

The group members will like each other  
Big Sisters will be responsible and consistent  
The group will run smoothly and successfully  
The Big Sisters and Little Sisters will learn new things  
The school/principal will support the group  
The group will be fun for everyone  
The group will have a positive experience  
The group will have a positive termination  
The group will work through challenging times

#### FEARS

I won't know how to handle challenging situations  
The Little Sisters won't open up to me  
The Little Sisters won't like me  
I won't like the girls, other Big Sisters or the group leader  
I won't know how to do any of the activities  
I won't know how to talk to the Little Sisters  
I won't be appreciated  
It will take too much time  
Little Sisters will drop out of the program  
We'll have nothing in common

#### FEARS

The Big Sisters won't like me  
The Big Sisters will leave me/drop out of the program  
The Big Sisters will be undependable  
The Big Sisters will be like my parent  
The TEAM group will be like school  
The Big Sisters will be ashamed of me  
The Big Sisters will be critical or tell me what to do  
One or more Big Sisters will be boring  
We won't have anything in common  
The Big Sisters won't like the same things I do

#### FEARS

The group members will not like each other  
Big Sisters will be inconsistent  
Big Sisters and group facilitator will not communicate  
Big Sisters will lose contact with the agency  
The group will end on a bad note  
Big Sisters or Little Sisters drop out of the program  
Either Big Sisters or Little Sisters will be hurt  
The group will be chaotic and out of control

## MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT TEAM BIGS AND LITTLES<sup>1</sup>

Myth	Reality
Only girls with significant problems get referred to TEAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Girls are referred for a wide variety of reasons</li> <li>Participation in TEAM is voluntary for all members</li> <li>Not all girls have problems, but all are in need of positive relationships that can help them grow into caring, confident and competent individuals</li> </ul>
TEAM Little Sisters come only from disadvantaged families	Families of girls referred to TEAM represent ALL socio-economic levels
The girls referred to TEAM are causing trouble in their families and/or in their schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many times, the actions of girls who may be in trouble are merely a reflections of deeper issues within their family or society in general</li> </ul> <p>For example, the pressures on girls to conform to societal standards of looks and behavior is intense during middle school. How they handle these pressures is based largely on what skills they have. Big Sisters can provide needed support and guidance during this challenging time.</p>
Only motherless girls or girls from single parent homes are referred to the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children from all family situations are referred</li> <li>Our Little Sisters may live with a single parent (male or female), with both parents, with extended family or in a foster home</li> </ul>
The Little Sisters will be interested in all of the topics and they will participate in every activity or game the group leader brings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little Sisters hold a wide variety of interests</li> <li>It is important to learn and build upon Little Sisters' unique talents and strengths</li> <li>Many young people lack exposure and aren't aware of the opportunities that are available to them; because of this, Big Sisters can introduce or engage in new activities or discussions that may be of interest to the child</li> </ul>
<p>As a Big Sister, I have to know everything about all of the Little Sisters in the group</p> <p>or</p> <p>Little Sisters will pour out their hearts to me because I am a caring person who wants to make a difference in their lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The TEAM program is a group program and therefore, a close relationship with every girl may or may not develop</li> <li>Not all children want to talk about personal concerns with their Big Sisters, as they see the Big Sisters and the group as a respite or escape from those issues</li> <li>The family may have strong boundaries around discussing personal concerns with individuals outside of the family; it is important to respect their privacy,</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Developed by Big Sister of Central Indiana (BSCI), 1999; adapted by Group Mentoring Department. 2006



Myth	Reality
	<p>and to not take this personally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little Sisters have different personalities, and therefore, different needs for disclosure</li> </ul>
As a Big Sister, the Little Sisters have to know everything about my childhood or current life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important to remember that the Little Sisters are not our peers, but children/teens</li> <li>• It is important for the Big Sisters to maintain a level of privacy about personal matters</li> <li>• If personal information is shared, it should be relevant to the child's stated concerns, and should be stated in a general, supportive and positive manner</li> <li>• It's often helpful to quietly ask yourself, "How will this benefit the <i>group members</i>?" before sharing personal information</li> </ul>
This is meant to be a very serious relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is vital to have fun and to try to experience new things</li> <li>• It is important that the volunteer be willing to be a "kid at heart" and engage in activities with enthusiasm and positively</li> <li>• It is important to remember that the relationship is a two way street; while Big Sisters hope to broaden the world for their Little Sisters, it's important to realize that they broaden our worlds too</li> </ul>
I will change my Little Sisters' lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact a Big Sister has on a child's life is dependent upon the relationship they are able to establish and the consistency of contact</li> <li>• It is important to maintain realistic expectations and realize a Big Sister's role is to plant seeds of hope and caring, the Big Sisters may or may not see the positive impact of their relationship on the child's life right away</li> </ul>

## **TEAM Scenarios/Role Plays**

### **Personal Questions**

A Little Sister asks if you have a boyfriend. **How do you respond? What assumptions are made in her inquiry? How can you respond in a way that is sensitive to all members of the group?**

A Little Sister asks you how old you were when you lost your virginity. **How are you feeling? What are you thinking? How do you respond?**

### **Values**

Some of the Little Sisters say that they are not interested in pursuing higher education. **What are you feeling? What are you thinking? What do you say/do as a mentor?**

One of the Little Sisters in your group shares with you her goal of becoming a teen mother. **What are you feeling? What are you thinking? How do you respond as a mentor?**

### **Appropriate Behavior**

You are working with a group of Little Sisters and two of them keep looking your way and laughing. It feels like they're making fun of you. **What do you do? What do you say to the Little Sisters?**

### **Problem Solving**

You and another Big Sister, Carmen, are working with a group of Little Sisters. The other Big Sister is very talkative and you just can't seem to get a word in edgewise. You decide to talk to her after the group. **What do you say? What things could you do?**

### **Inclusion**

One of the Little Sisters in your group is always quiet. You're doing a group activity today and again Jazmine is silent. You decide to try to get Jazmine to talk. **What do you say? How might you help engage her?**

### **Misbehavior**

You are working with five Little Sisters on a collage activity. No one is in their chair, everyone is talking at once and no one is listening to you. **How are you feeling? What are you thinking? How might you intervene? What are some of your options?**



## **TEAM Big Sister Resources**

### **Books**

#### **Non-fiction:**

Odd Girl Out by Rachel Simmons

Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out edited by Hilary Carlip

Don't Give it Away by Iyanla Vanzant

Queen Bees & Wannabees by Rosiland Wiseman

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Lives of Adolescent Girls by Mary Pipher

Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write about their Search for Self edited by Sara Sandler

Am I the Last Virgin? edited by Tara Roberts

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives revised edition by Ruth Bell and others

Friendship from the New Moon Books Girls Editorial Board, Crown, 1999

The Period Book: Everything You Don't Want to Ask (but Need to Know) by Karen Gravelle and Jennifer Gravelle

Speak for Yourself: What Girls Say about What Girls Need by Lynn Phillips

#### **Fiction:**

She's Come Undone by Wally Lamb

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

Crooked Little Heart by Anne Lamott

The Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood by Rebecca Wells

Almost a Woman by Esmeralda Santiago

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

### **Movies**

*Thirteen*

*Mean Girls*

*Girl, Interrupted*

*Love and Basketball*

*Welcome to the Dollhouse*

*The Joy Luck Club*

*Girls Town*

*The Breakfast Club*

*Quincinera*

*Real Women Have Curves*

*Girlhood* (documentary)

*The Craft*

*Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

*The Color Purple*

*10 Things I Hate About You*

*Odd Girl Out*

*Heathers*

### **Magazines**

Teen Voices

New Moon

### **Websites**

[www.girlscoalition.com](http://www.girlscoalition.com)

[www.teenvoices.com](http://www.teenvoices.com)