

# Big Sister Starter Kit

# BIGSISTERBOSTON



Welcome to the *SISTERHOOD*



@bigsisterboston



Big Sister Association  
OF GREATER BOSTON

“

Those first three months, they're tough. I understand why you ask us to do it though, [meet weekly, that is] and I think it helped [us] build a sturdy foundation. What should new Big Sisters know? It gets easier – I promise! It's so wonderful now; it's just a part of my life. A wonderful part of my life.” -**Big Sister Ann**

## Welcome!

Welcome to your Big Sister Starter Kit. Here you will find ice breakers, answers to common questions, information about girls' development, and advice that will help you get off to a great start in your relationship with your Little Sister! If you have any further concerns or questions, your Match Support Specialist can help!

Additionally, be sure to check out our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion resources on our website to further your learning and enhance your match relationship:  
<https://bit.ly/3PefZI9>

## Getting to Know You

### Tips and games for breaking the ice and learning about each other

1. At the beginning of your visit, you and your Little Sister can reflect back and share your "highs and lows" or your "rants and raves" from the previous week
2. You and your Little Sister can get to know each other more by completing the "My Favorite Things" Venn diagram activity on page 5 together.
3. Try asking each other some of the fun questions to the right. Find creative ways to make them interactive: for example, pretend to be talk show hosts and take turns interviewing each other; cut these into strips and store them in a baggie – bring it with you on visits and when you are waiting in line or enjoying a meal, pull one out to ask each other; start each weekly visit with one for the first 3 months; etc.

### If your Little Sister is 7-11 years old, try asking...

*If you could be invisible where would you like to go?*

*How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?*

*If you won the lottery, how would you spend it?*

*Do you have a nickname? How did you get it? Do you like it?*

*What makes you LOL?*

*What do you want to be when you grow up?*

*What's your idea of a perfect day?*

*What is the quality you most like in a friend?*

*Who are your friends and family? Who are the people you are closest to?*

*What is your favorite thing to do right after school/work?*

*If you could be any animal, what would you choose?*

### If your Little Sister is 12-15 years old, try asking...

*If you could be invisible where would you like to go?*

*How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?*

*Name two famous people you would like as friends and tell why.*

*Where would you go on vacation if you could go anywhere in the world?*

*If you won the lottery, how would you spend it?*

*Do you have a nickname? How did you get it? Do you like it?*

*What makes you LOL?*

*What do you want to be when you grow up?*

*What's your idea of a perfect day?*

*Who are some of your heroes in real life?*



## Commuting Games

**You may remember playing these classic games while you were growing up! These are a few examples of fun games you and your Little Sister can enjoy while you commute to or from your match activity.**



### License Plate Game

A basic, collaborative version of this game involves trying to find a license plate from each U.S. state. There is room for many variations: You can score points based on the numbers on the plate, as well as extra points for letters or for finding a word. After one player has spotted a plate especially rare in this area, the other player could get a higher number of points by spotting another plate that matches the first. Get creative, and write your own rules together!

### The Alphabet Game

Each player looks for letters of the alphabet that appear on signs or license plates (either each looking on her side of the road, or both looking at both). The object of the game is to point out all the letters of the alphabet in order, from A to Z. The first person to spot the entire alphabet wins, or you can work together.

### The Animal Name Game

One person names an animal. Then each take turns to name another animal (no repeating!) that starts with the last letter of the previous animal named. There are no winners or losers in this game. With older children, try the game with TV shows, or geographical categories such as cities or countries.

### Two Truths and a Lie

Each person thinks of three statements about themselves. Two of the statements should be true and one of them should be a lie – take your time to think of funny, surprising, or interesting ones! Then take turns, with one person sharing all three of their statements and the other guessing which is not true.

## 20 Questions Game

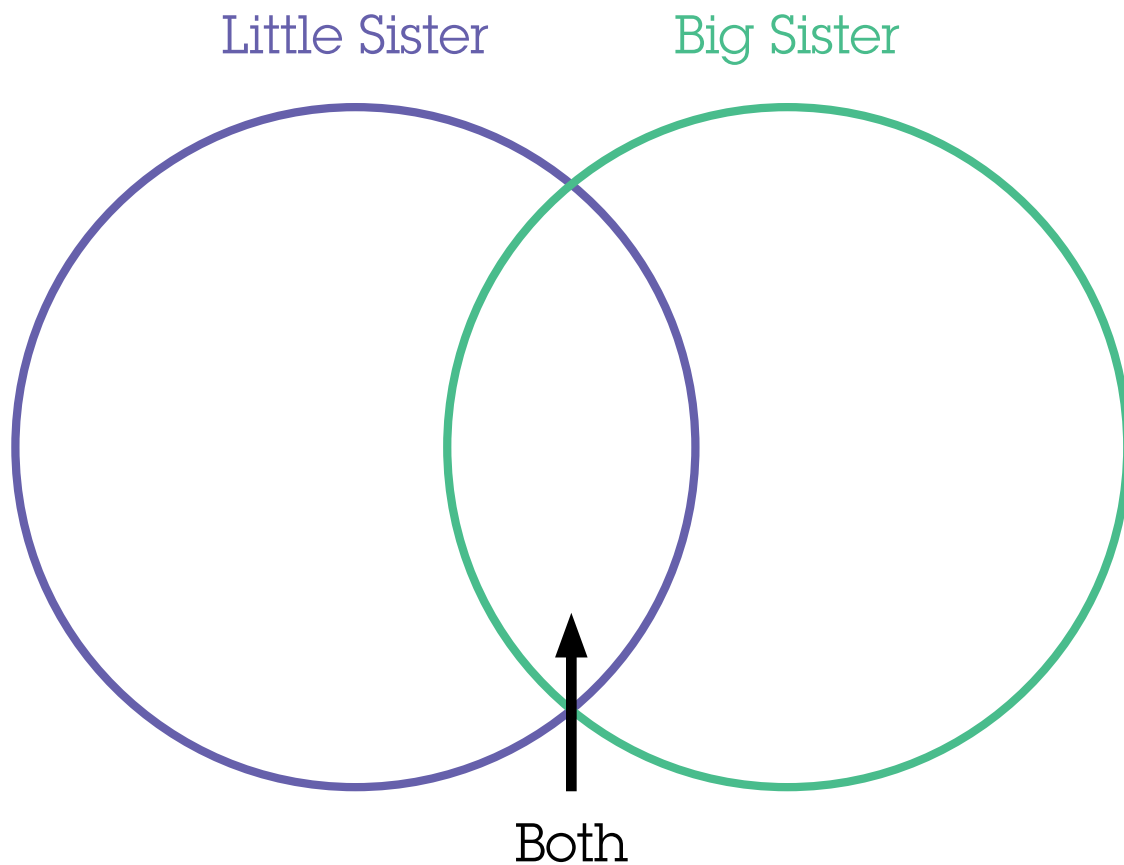
One player is chosen to be the answerer. That person chooses something to have in mind, but does not reveal what it is. The other player is the questioner. She asks questions which can be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No." Sample questions could be: "Is it bigger than a breadbox?" or "Can I put it in my mouth?" Strategic questions can narrow things down a lot! The answerer has to answer, and has to answer truthfully. If a questioner guesses the correct answer, that questioner wins and becomes the answerer for the next round. If 20 questions are asked without a correct guess, then the answerer has stumped the questioner and gets to be the answerer for another round.

## GHOST – great option for matches with older Little Sisters!

One person starts, and begins by naming any letter of the alphabet. Players then take turns to add letters to this fragment, with the aim being to avoid completing an actual word. The player whose turn it is may - instead of adding a letter - challenge the previous player to prove that the current fragment is actually the beginning of a word. If the challenged player can name such a word, the challenger loses the round; otherwise the challenged player loses the round. If a player bluffs, or completes a word without other players noticing, then play continues. When a round ends, it is the other person's turn to start. If any score is kept at all, the traditional method uses the letters of the word "Ghost" in the same fashion as the basketball game Horse, with each loss giving the player the next letter of the word, and a player being eliminated when they have all five letters.

## My Favorite Things!

Fill out this Venn diagram with your Sister. You can write in activities, music, foods, movies, or anything else that you like! If the interest is shared between the two of you, make sure to put it in the middle!



## Discussion

- *What activities are you most excited about doing with your Sister?*
- *Is there a new activity that you can try together?*
- *What interest of yours can you teach your Sister about?*
- *How can we find ways to explore and learn about our different interests?*
- *How can we incorporate different things we like to do on visits together?*
- *What was one new thing you learned about your Sister from making the Venn Diagram?*



## Match Activities

**In addition to the suggestions you'll receive via our Match Activity calendar that will be emailed to you every month, here are some fun, low- to no-cost ideas for indoor and outdoor activities!**

## Indoor Fun:

### Physical Activities

- Visit Sky Zone Indoor Trampoline Park in Everett, Big Sister's pay \$25 for 90 minutes of jumping and Little's will jump for free
- Attend a Girls' LEAP Defense Course- [girlsleap.org](http://girlsleap.org)
- Rollerblade at Chez Vous in Dorchester or Roller World on Route 1 in Saugus
- Catch a class with our partner at 4 Corners Yoga + Wellness in Dorchester
- Take a dance class at The Dance Complex in Central Square- [dancecomplex.org](http://dancecomplex.org)
- Walk around the mall and window shop; add the twist of a scavenger hunt

### Arts & Crafts

- Each contribute 5 rainy day activities and 5 sunny day activities and make a "sunny day" basket and "rainy day" basket and pick out an idea depending on the weather
- Stop into Stitch House in Dorchester (owned by our President & CEO!) for a knit, crochet, sewing, or quilting class - [www.stitchhousedorchester.com](http://www.stitchhousedorchester.com)
- Visit Boston Bead Company and make your own jewelry-: [bostonbeadcompany.com](http://bostonbeadcompany.com)
- Paint pottery at The Clay Room- Little Sisters receive \$10 off on studio fees so be sure to say you're a Big Sister match- [clayroom.com](http://clayroom.com)

- The Paint Bar in Newton- [thepaintbar.com](http://thepaintbar.com)
- Plaster Fun Time- [plasterfuntime.com](http://plasterfuntime.com)
- Create and decorate a "Match Scrap Book" or "Match Journal" which you can pass back and forth between visits
- Write a children's book and include illustrations
- Around holiday times, make and decorate cards for friends and family
- Learn Origami
- Pretend you're at a spa and do an at home manicure/pedicure, but please be sure to ask permission



## Culinary

- Bake cookies, cake, bread, etc.
- Cook dinner- try new recipes and create your own cookbook
- Play restaurant- create a name, a menu, and set the table
- Have themed meals with a movie– ie. eat Indian food and watch "Bend It Like Beckham"
- Tour the Taza Chocolate Factory in Somerville for \$5 per person - buy one get one - [tazachocolate.com](http://tazachocolate.com)
- For a \*special\* treat- keep your eye out for Boston Restaurant Weeks and enjoy a delicious discounted meal



## Educational

- Learn about a particular subject-culture, cooking, etc. by going to your Little Sister's local library
- Go to a bookstore and have story time
- Choose a book to read and discuss together
- Learn sign language

## Games

- Board games- favorites include Clue, Monopoly, and Sorry
- Mad Libs
- Play cards, either new games like Spoons or favorites like Uno
- Learn magic tricks
- Make your own fortune teller: [dltk-kids.com](http://dltk-kids.com)
- Make your own crossword puzzles: [discovery.com](http://discovery.com)





## Outdoor Fun:

### Physical Activities

- Walk around Castle Island in South Boston
- Walk along the Freedom Trail: [thefreedomtrail.org](http://thefreedomtrail.org)
- Explore the Rose Kennedy Greenway which runs from Chinatown to the North End
- Visit the Boston Common Frog Pond for summer and winter activities: [bostonfrogpond.com](http://bostonfrogpond.com)
- Explore the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain
- Check out The Black Heritage Trail: [nps.gov](http://nps.gov)
- Visit Jamaica Pond-Forest Hills stop off of the Orange Line
- Walk in the North End and grab a cannoli at the famous Mike's Pastry
- Stroll along Newbury Street
- In the summer months, go for a swim! Find a local pool at [mass.gov/dcr/recreate/pools.htm](http://mass.gov/dcr/recreate/pools.htm)
- Big and Little Sisters get a free 3-month pass to the YMCA - check out your local one and see what classes or other activities they offer
- Visit your local dog park and play with the neighborhood dogs
- Get out your bikes and take a bike ride. Don't have a bike?- Use [www.bluebikes.com](http://www.bluebikes.com) to get one

### Leisure

- Have a picnic at Moakley Park, the beach in South Boston, the Boston Common or Garden, Piers in East Boston, Millennium Park in West Roxbury, Pope John Paul II Park in Dorchester, or the Charles River Esplanade
- Relax on the grounds of the Christian Science Center

- Visit Haymarket on Fridays and Saturdays to watch the spectacle of Boston transformed to an old world market, complete with fresh produce at inexpensive prices
- Take the T to Revere Beach- Blue Line to the Revere stop
- Attend a "Free Friday Night Flick" at the Hatch Shell during the summer months- [hatchshell.com](http://hatchshell.com)
- Ride the Swan Boats at the Boston Public Garden- April through September- \$2.50 for adults and \$1.50 for kids
- Explore and stroll through the SoWa Open Market in the South End- Open Sundays May-October
- Plant a garden or flowers in a window box



## Museums & Cultural Attractions:

### Landmarks

- Lookout on top of the Prudential Center
- Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown—climb the 294 steps to the top for unparalleled views of the Boston skyline
- Watch the street performers at Harvard Square
- Explore Boston Public Garden and Boston Common
- Take the ferry from Long Wharf to the Navy Yard
- Wander around Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market
- Visit the JFK Library- [jfklibrary.org](http://jfklibrary.org)
- Tour the Massachusetts State House- explore the oldest building on Beacon Hill with a 45-minute tour- [sec.state.ma.us/trs/trsidx.htm](http://sec.state.ma.us/trs/trsidx.htm)
- View a family film at the Central Library- check the Boston Public Library website for details- [bpl.org](http://bpl.org)

### Music & Theater

- Check out bands coming to university campuses
- In summer months enjoy free outdoor concerts at the Hatch Shell, the Pru, and City Hall - [celebrateboston.com/events/city-hallconcerts.htm](http://celebrateboston.com/events/city-hallconcerts.htm)
- Attend a performance at the Wheelock Family Theater
- Family Theater - [wheelockfamilytheatre.org](http://wheelockfamilytheatre.org)



## Museums

- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum - free for children 18 and under and free for all on first Thursday of each month - [gardnermuseum.org](http://gardnermuseum.org)
- Children's Museum- \$1 admission on Fridays- [bostonkids.org](http://bostonkids.org)
- Museum of Fine Art- Wednesdays 4PM-9:45PM free for all- [mfa.org](http://mfa.org)
- The Museum of African American History- free for children 12 and under, \$3 for ages 13-17, and \$5 for adults-[afroammuseum.org](http://afroammuseum.org)
- Explore the New England Holocaust Memorial- [nehm.org](http://nehm.org)
- Tour the USS Constitution- free for all- [ussconstitution.navy.mil](http://ussconstitution.navy.mil)
- Stargaze for free at the Coit Observatory, Boston University- Wednesday nights- call for details about the program before attending- (617) 353-2630
- Stargaze for free at the Gilliland Observatory, Museum of Science- Friday nights during months March-November- call for details about the program before attending- (617) 589-0267
- Franklin Park Zoo- \$17 for adults and \$11 for children 12 and under- [zoonewengland.org](http://zoonewengland.org)
- Visit the New England Aquarium- Big Sisters pay for their own ticket and then their Little Sisters can enter for free so be sure to say that you're a Big Sister match- [neaq.org](http://neaq.org)
- Mapparium at The Mary Baker Eddy Library- \$6 for adults and \$4 for youth 17 and under- [marybakereddylibrary.org](http://marybakereddylibrary.org)
- Harvard Museum of Natural History- Free admission for MA residents on Sundays all year 9AM-12PM and on Wednesdays 3PM-5PM for months September-May- [hmnh.harvard.edu](http://hmnh.harvard.edu)
- MIT Museum- free admission on Sundays 10AM-12PM- [web.mit.edu/museum](http://web.mit.edu/museum)
- Institute of Contemporary Art- always free admission for youth 17 and under and free for all ages on Thursdays 5PM-9PM- [icaboston.org](http://icaboston.org)





## Virtual Activity Ideas

- Enjoy some arts & crafts activities via video call - when you're choosing projects, think of what materials your Little Sister already has at home, like toilet paper rolls, or send them a care package with some affordable materials. Check out Big Sister's Pinterest board for craft ideas: <https://www.pinterest.com/bigsisterboston/>
- Write letters to each other - include a self-addressed envelope and stamp so your Little Sister can write back
- Check out the Disney Escape Room at <https://bit.ly/3uR4OgC>
- Play Scattergories
- Pick a recipe together and try to bake it! Depending on her age and/or baking expertise, please make sure your Little Sister has some kitchen supervision before trying this one!
- Pick a "Paint night"-style tutorial on YouTube and follow along at home
- Do a virtual yoga or dance class together - YouTube has tons of free options
- Check out a virtual tour of a museum
- Read a story together and discuss every few chapters
- Play Roblox
- Discover and compete in online quizzes with Sporcle.com
- Play <https://skribbl.io/> (an online game like Pictionary) - please create a Private Room so that it's just you and your Little playing!
- Check out the live camera at an aquarium or a zoo
- Do a virtual puzzle together at <https://bit.ly/3yCmxsU>
- Play Among Us





## North Shore/West of Boston Activities & Attractions:

### Outdoor

- Hike in the Fells- Stoneham
- Enjoy the outdoors at Breakheart Reservation- Saugus- [mass.gov/dcr/parks/metroboston/breakhrt.htm](http://mass.gov/dcr/parks/metroboston/breakhrt.htm)
- Attend a Lowell Spinners game- Boston Red Sox Minor League team- [lowellspinners.com](http://lowellspinners.com)
- Visit Appleton Farms- Ipswich
- In the autumn go to the Topsfield Fair- [topsfieldfair.org](http://topsfieldfair.org)
- Visit the Crane Estate- Ipswich
- Take a trip to Nahant Beach
- In the spring go to the Strawberry Festival-Topsfield
- Walden Pond- Lincoln

### Museums & Cultural Attractions

- The National Heritage Museum- Lexington- free for all- [monh.org](http://monh.org)
- Stone Zoo-Stoneham- \$14 for adults and \$10 for children 12 and under- visit [zoonewengland.org](http://zoonewengland.org)
- deCordova Sculpture Park & Museum- Lincoln- [decordova.org](http://decordova.org)
- Visit Salem- the historical site of the Salem Witch Trials- [salem.org](http://salem.org)
- Brooksby Farm- Peabody- [essexheritage.org](http://essexheritage.org)
- Minuteman National Park- go for a hike- near Lexington and Lincoln

## South Shore Activities & Attractions:

- Brookwood Farm- Milton- arrange a visit to learn about farming- [brookwoodcommunityfarm.org](http://brookwoodcommunityfarm.org)
- Hike at the Blue Hills- Milton
- Visit Houghton's Pond at Blue Hills- Milton
- Visit Nantasket Beach- Hull
- In the winter go to Blue Hills Ski Area- Canton
- Weir River Farm- Hingham- hike around the area and visit the farm- [thetrustees.org/pages/391\\_weir\\_river\\_farm.cfm](http://thetrustees.org/pages/391_weir_river_farm.cfm)

## Community Service:

- Visit a local animal shelter, ie. MSPCA in Jamaica Plain: [mspca.org](http://mspca.org)
- Volunteer to walk for a cause
- Volunteer at a local soup kitchen
- Keep your eye out for e-mails from Big Sister about upcoming community service opportunities

## Helpful Tips & Websites

- Check your e-mail for monthly calendars, free ticket opportunities, match activities, and Big Sister newsletters
- Follow @bigsisterboston on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok for activity ideas
- Boston Globe- source for many events taking place in the city: [boston.com/thingstodo](http://boston.com/thingstodo)
- Boston Central- suggestions for attractions, events and activity ideas: [bostoncentral.com](http://bostoncentral.com)
- Boston Youth Zone- website sponsored by the city of Boston with ideas for children and teens- [bostonyouthzone.com](http://bostonyouthzone.com)
- City of Boston- up-to-date information on events and attractions within the city: [cityofboston.gov](http://cityofboston.gov)
- Volunteer Match- find a place to volunteer together- [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org)
- Teen Life- get ideas for things to do with your teenage Little Sister: [teenlife.com](http://teenlife.com)
- The Department of Recreation and Conservation- calendar of events year-round for Boston, North Shore and South Shore- [mass.gov/dcr/events.htm](http://mass.gov/dcr/events.htm)
- Get fun arts & crafts ideas on [pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com)
- Visit [zipcar.com](http://zipcar.com) if you need to rent a car, Big Sisters receive discounts so be sure to say that you are a Big Sister
- Be sure to follow us on Facebook and Instagram for activity ideas and opportunities
- Attend Big Sister's annual events, including the Appreciation Breakfast, Summer Picnic, Halloween Party and Winter Wonderland Party



## Visit “Enders”

**Now you've come to the end of your visit – not sure how to wrap things up? You may want to reflect back on all the fun things you did this day, stop and take a selfie, or come up with a cool hand shake. Here are some suggestions on ways to engage your Little Sister during your closing ritual:**

### Reflection Questions

- What was your favorite part about today's visit?
- What did we learn?
- What was the biggest surprise?
- What do we rate this visit, on a scale of “no thanks” to “greatest day of my life”?

*\*If your Little Sister is not as talkative, you may want to try teaching her “Fist-to-Five.” She can rate the visit on a scale of 0-5 by holding up the appropriate amount of fingers (5 being the most fun)\**

### Closing Rituals

- Taking a goofy photo together at the end of each visit, a “silly selfie”
- Write a short journal entry together about what you did
- Use a colorful pen or fun sticker to mark together on your calendars the day of your next visit or phone call
- Add any new ideas to your “activities jar” or “match bucket list”
- Offer each other the choice of a “Hug, High-five, or a Handshake” to show affection while respecting each other's boundaries
- Get creative! Come up with your own closing ritual together!

What if...

## Common Questions of New Big Sisters

### 1. ...my Little Sister is quiet on visits?

#### Keep in mind:

- Your Little Sister may be shy, and even if she isn't, it may take some time for her to warm up to someone new.
- Your Little Sister may not be used to receiving this much attention from an adult who is not their caregiver and might need some time to adjust.
- Silence often feels more awkward for adults than it does for kids. Being quiet isn't necessarily a sign that your Little Sister is uncomfortable.
  - Take the lead by asking open-ended questions and being engaged.
  - Do a fun activity together. Activities help foster communication and give you both something to talk about.

### 2. ...my Little Sister doesn't seem engaged in planning activities with me?

- It is very normal for Little Sisters to have a hard time suggesting activity ideas. It's important not to take this as a sign of disinterest in spending time with you!
- Try giving your Little Sister a couple of activity options to choose from; this can feel less overwhelming than coming up with an idea from scratch.
- Brainstorm ideas together! A fun match activity can be coming up with a "bucket list" of things you'd like to do with one another.



## What if...

### 3. ...I have trouble communicating/scheduling with my Little Sister's family?

- Try designating a day each week to check in with your Little Sister and her caregiver.
- Work with your Little Sister's caregiver to find the most convenient method of communication (Cell number? Work number? Text? Email?)
- Use calendars to write down and keep track of when visits are scheduled (creating your own calendar sheets might even be a fun match activity!)
- Try planning out visits at the beginning of each month
- Communicate these challenges to your Match Support Specialist and they can help you reach the family and talk about communication

### 4. ...my Little Sister's family expects me to do things outside of the program guidelines?

- Gently remind them! It is easy to forget or get confused (especially because caregivers do not go through a training program), so don't be afraid to talk about it.
- Reference agency policies and refer back to the match contract. If caregivers have further questions, your Match Support Specialist will be happy to speak with them

### 5. ...I don't know if my Little Sister feels close to me yet?

- Remember that forming great friendships takes time! This is totally normal!
- The more time you spend together, the more your relationship will deepen
- Some Little Sisters (especially teenage ones!) can be hard to read. However, if your Little Sister keeps wanting to spend time with you then she is probably enjoying herself
- Remember that you and your Little Sister's relationship is unique!

## What if...

### 6. ...I have a hard time coming up with low/no cost activities?

#### Utilize Big Sister Boston's resources:

- Monthly activity calendar sent via email
- Annual events such as our Summer Picnic or Winter Wonderland Party
- Ticket opportunities advertised via email and on our Facebook page (first come first served, so remember to respond quickly!)
- Activity packet included in this Big Sister Starter Kit!
  - During the warmer months, take advantage of the great outdoors and the many free concerts and festivals that happen around the city.
  - When the weather's not great, consider having visits at your home (if you and your Little Sister are both comfortable with this).
  - Your Match Support Specialist can help connect you and your Little Sister to specific community resources if she has a specialized interest

### 7. ...my Little Sister doesn't seem to need a Big Sister?

- Remember that all girls can benefit from a mentor! There is no such thing as too much support in a young girl's life
- It is important to build trust and a strong relationship now so that you can be there if she confronts challenges later on
- Keep in mind that the effects of having a mentor can take time
- If your Little Sister seems "too busy for a Big Sister," try and find ways that you can occasionally incorporate spending time together with her pre-arranged activities ( e.g. attending her sports games, recitals, or school activities)
- Every girl is different and how they show appreciation for you may be different from how you would express it!

## Girls' Development

In childhood, many girls have a strong sense of self and feel confident speaking their minds.

Research suggests that in childhood, many girls have a very strong sense of self—where they are comfortable expressing their feelings and speaking their minds. This resiliency is linked to their strong relationships—being connected to others in an authentic way.

In adolescence, girls begin to question what they think & feel.

During early adolescence or even pre-adolescence girls begin to question themselves. Traditional psychology focused on development during adolescence as being about independence and separation. More recent research on women's psychological development suggests that connection and relationships, rather than separation, was a guiding principle of growth for women.

Girls' desire to connect with others can result in inauthentic relationships.

Girls continue to seek connection, but this tendency to question their own voices can lead to inauthentic relationships, where they are silent about their needs and/or unable to share their feelings. The result is disconnection from others and themselves.

What would you like on your pizza?

Pepperoni!

What would you like on your pizza?

I don't know. Whatever you want.

### **This is called loss of voice.**

Although some girls may become quieter, this experience is not synonymous with being silent.

### **However, all girls experience development differently!**

At Big Sister, we focus on building girls' **resiliency**. As a mentor, you have a special and powerful role in identifying her **strengths** and helping her **grow!**

## Middle Childhood: 8 - 10 Years of Age

**While there are common characteristics for certain age groups, it is important to note that every girl is unique!**

### General Characteristics

- Interested in people, aware of differences, will to give more to others, but expects more
- Busy, active, full of enthusiasm, may try too much, interest in money and its value
- Sensitive to criticism, recognize failure, capacity for self-evaluation
- Capable of prolonged interest, may make plans on own
- Decisive, dependable, reasonable, strong sense of right and wrong
- Can spend a great deal of time in talk and discussion, often outspoken and critical of adults, although still dependent on adult approval

### Physical Characteristics

- Very active and need frequent breaks from tasks to do things that are fun for them and involve use of energy
- May tend to be accident-prone
- Early maturation, may be upset with their size; a listening ear and your explanations will help
- Self-conscious about sexual development

### Social Characteristics

- Can be very competitive
- Choosy about friends
- Dislikes playing alone
- Team games become popular
- Worshipping heroes, TV stars, sports figures is common
- Being accepted by friend becomes quite important

### Emotional Characteristics

- Sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are hurt easily
- There can be conflicts between adults' rules and friends' rules

### Mental Characteristics

- The idea of fairness becomes a big issue
- Eager to answer questions
- Very curious, however may have short attention span
- Wide discrepancies in reading abilities
- Desire for more independence, but she knows she needs guidance and support

### Suggested Big Sister Strategies

- Recognize allegiance to friends
- Remind her of her responsibilities in a two-way relationship
- Acknowledge performance: "Hey, watch this!"
- Offer enjoyable learning experiences; great time to teach about different cultures
- Provide frank answers to questions about upcoming physiological changes

### Suggested Activities

- Video/board games
- Science projects
- Craft projects and drawing
- Swimming, bowling, miniature golf



## Early Adolescence: 11-13 Years of Age

**While there are common characteristics for certain age groups, it is important to note that every girl is unique!**

### General Characteristics

- Testing limits, "know-it-all" attitude
- Identification with an admired adult
- Body changes affect appearance
- Vulnerable, emotionally insecure, fear of rejection, mood swings

### Physical Characteristics

- Small-muscle coordination is good, and interests in art, crafts, models, and music are popular
- She may be very concerned with her appearance and self-conscious about growth
- Diet and sleep habits can be bad, which may result in low energy levels
- Girls may begin menstruation

### Social Characteristics

- Being accepted by friends is very important
- Cliques start to develop outside of school
- Team games become popular
- Friends set the general rule of behavior
- Feel a real need to conform
- Concerned about what other say and think of them
- A tendency to manipulate others
- Interested in earning own money

### Emotional Characteristics

- Sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are easily hurt
- Caught between being a child and being an adult
- Conflicts between adults' rules and friends' rules
- Look at the world more objectively; adults can be seen as subjective, critical

### Mental Characteristics

- Desire for more independence, but know there's a need for guidance and support
- Attention span can be lengthy
- Beginning to move from concrete thinking (what is) to abstract thinking (what might be true)
- Can't always perceive long-range implications of current decision

### Suggested Big Sister Strategies

- Offer alternative opinions without being insistent
- Be accepting of different physical states and emotion changes
- Share aspects of professional life and rewards of achieving in work
- Do not tease about appearance, clothes, friends, and sexuality; affirm often

### Suggested Activities

- Listen to music
- Creative writing
- Movies
- Bicycle trip
- Take her to your workplace
- Movies

Being a Big Sister is about being

## PRESENT, NOT PERFECT

Maybe you're not perfect. Maybe you didn't check off numbers nine and ten on your to-do list. Maybe you had a little too much cheesecake and not enough salad at your last meal. Maybe you're a little too hard on yourself. Maybe you could use some more support sometimes. Maybe you could use a mentor on the tough days.

But then again, maybe you're a good listener. Maybe you're compassionate and caring. Maybe you're a hard worker, a trustworthy friend, and a supportive should to lean on. Maybe you're not perfect, but according to your Little Sister, you don't have to be perfect to be just what she needs.

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You are making a difference, by being you and sharing yourself with your Little Sister.”

Research indicates that the strongest and most influential mentors are those who show consistency and commitment to building a healthy, symbiotic relationship with their mentee. Being a successful mentor means opening up and being real. It means being dedicated to learning about your Little Sister and about yourself. Little Sisters feel connected to their Big Sisters because Big Sisters listen. They support. They care and

criticize constructively. They are admirable and accessible. Big Sisters are successful because they foster success in others.

You are making a difference, by being you and sharing yourself with your Little Sister. You don't have to be a Nobel laureate or the head of a big company to be an impactful mentor. In fact, share your imperfections with your Little Sister. Show her that it's okay to make and learn from mistakes, that it's okay to ask for a helping hand. It's not about having all the answers, spending a lot of money, or going over the top. It's not about being perfect — it's about being present.

**-Amy Butterworth**

*Former Big Sister and staff member*