

**Big Brothers Big Sisters**

# **Parent and Caregiver Orientation Guide**

**Community Based Program**



## About Big Brothers Big Sisters

**B**ig Brothers Big Sisters has been bringing a little magic into the lives of children by matching them with adult volunteers in fun and rewarding relationships since 1904.

**Welcome!**

### **We need you to be an active Partner.**

Working together, Parents/Care Givers, volunteers, and the staff at Big Brothers Big Sisters of San Luis Obispo County (SLO Bigs) plan activities and opportunities that can have a powerful and positive impact on your child.

### **Who are our Big Brothers and Big Sisters?**

- Men and women who work and live in your community.
- High school and college students from nearby schools
- Retirees, military men and women, members of congregations or civic organizations, and...
- Just ordinary people that are extraordinary

What they all have in common is a sincere interest in being a friend and mentor to a child. They are not paid – all of their time is volunteered.

### **How do we select Volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters?**

Each volunteer must complete a screening process that includes:

- A written application
- A criminal history record check
- At least three references
- An in-person interview
- Questions about their home environment
- A professional decision about whether they should volunteer with a child
- An orientation and training process that will help to encourage your child's healthy development
- Big Brothers Big Sisters also provides child safety tips to you and your child, and we welcome your questions and feedback.

### **Who are our Little Brothers and Little Sisters?**

Most children in our community-based programs come to us through their parent or caregiver. We also reach out to involve children through churches, youth service agencies, and other referral sources.



**When they get together, what do matches do?**

They typically meet (insert agency frequency) times a month and go biking, fishing, to a show, go walking in the park or to a ball game. They also might bake a cake or build a birdhouse.

*They go places  
and do things  
that they  
both enjoy  
doing.*

**You as a parent or caregiver should know about each activity and give your approval in advance.**

When your child returns home from an activity with their Big, it's very important that you talk openly with them about the activity.

What did they do? Where did they go? Who else was there?

Make sure that your child is feels okay when they're with their Big.



## SLO BIGS Support - How SLO BIGS Works with You, Your Child & the Big

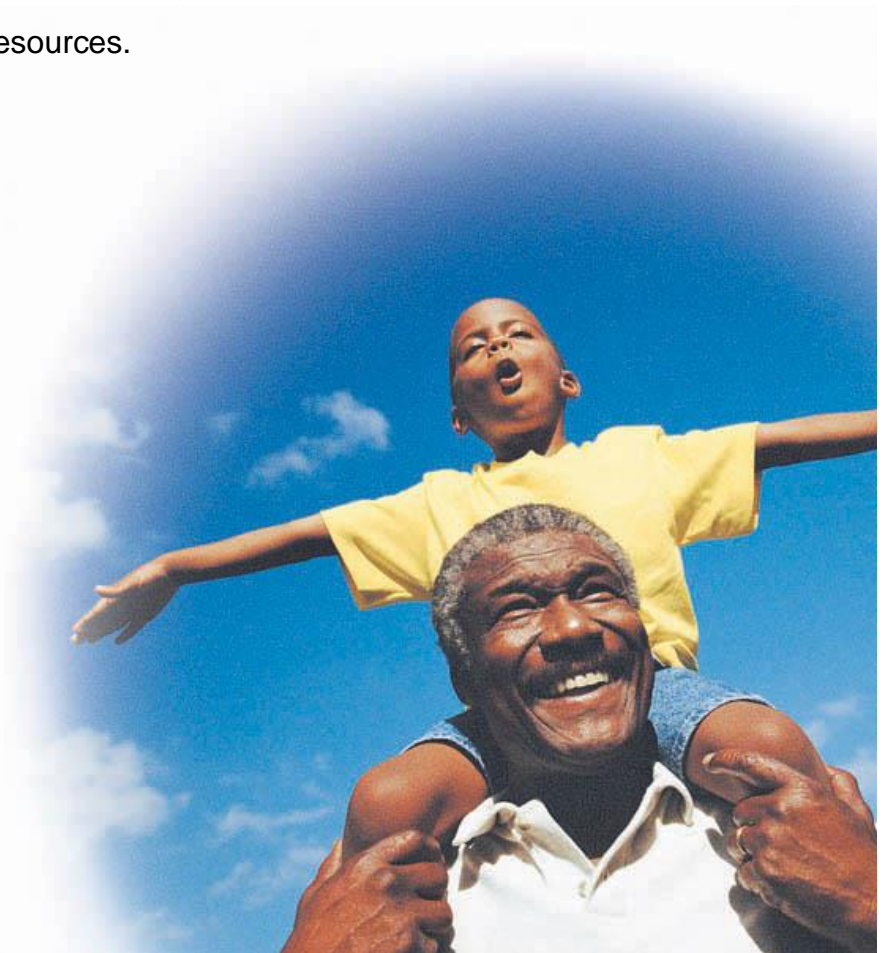
**B**BBS works hard to support the relationship between Bigs and Littles. Our goal is for the relationship to be as successful as possible for everyone. Bigs and Littles work with their Match Support Specialist/Team from their SLO BIGS agency.

It is important for us to talk with you every month for the first year of the match. This allows us to provide support, and offer ideas if problems arise. After the first year we will also contact you regularly.

**Your match support specialist (insert name and phone number) is the main link between you, your child, the Big Brother or Big Sister and the agency.**

That's not all that the Match Support Team provides for your match. They also:

- Find information and resources that you might be interested in.
- Connect you with community resources.
- Keep you updated on activities offered by the agency.
- Help you communicate with your child and their Big
- Work with you on any conflicts that might come up.





**Here are some good reasons for calling your Match Support Specialist:**

- To question your child's safety or well- being
- Discuss general concerns you are having about the Big Brother or Big Sister
- Report any changes in address or phone number
- Report any emergency situations or your child's illness
- Report any important family changes
- Report success stories about your child's progress or special honors

Contact your Match Support specialist by phone, Facebook, text and/or email--whichever is most convenient for you.

SLO Phone: (805) 781-3226

PASO Phone: (805) 239-3534

Text: (805) 242-5964:

Facebook: SLO Bigs (matches)

Email: [Sheena@slobigs.org](mailto:Sheena@slobigs.org) or [Maria@slobigs.org](mailto:Maria@slobigs.org)

If your Match Support specialist is not available please contact the agency for assistance. We make it a priority to serve you when you need it.





## A Top Priority-Child Safety

**Children's safety is our #1 priority. We focus on the child's safety and well-being throughout the match, not just at the beginning.**

While our staff carefully screens each volunteer, we need your help to make sure the relationship is healthy and the volunteer is making good judgments about your child's safety on outings. Remember:

- You should approve all activities and any dangerous activities should be reported to SLO Bigs;
- The Big should never leave your child in the care of another person who has not been screened by SLO Bigs and approved by you;
- Your child's Big should not use alcohol or other drugs before or during activities with you child;
- Using physical discipline or yelling at your child is never acceptable when a Big is with your child.
- Volunteers need to respect your child's privacy, providing separate sleeping, bathing/showering and changing quarters at all times;
- Volunteers should never ask a child to keep a secret.
- Volunteers should ask a child's parent before purchasing a gift for the Little;
- Activities such as tickling, wrestling, giving backrubs, or asking a child to sit on their lap may violate your child's personal boundaries and are not an okay form of displaying affection in our program;
- Showing pornography or sexual material is never acceptable. Explaining to a child about sex is a parent's role, not a Big's role. If the child asks questions about sexuality during the outing with the Big (which sometimes happens...especially during outings to observe wildlife such as the Monarch Butterflies or Elephant Seals), the Big should report that discussion to you so you can follow up with your child in a manner that feels appropriate for your family;
- If a Big tries to act like a parent or is too involved with the family, SLO Bigs Staff should be informed immediately.



**If, over time, you notice the following, you need to inform Big Brothers Big Sisters' staff:**

- Your child's Big wants to spend more and more time with your child
- Your child's Big often invites other children to join them in activities (siblings, child's friends, etc.);
- Activities always take place in private settings such as a volunteer's home, camping setting, overnight visits, instead of more public settings;
- Your child's Big takes an excessive amount of pictures or videos of your child;

We urge parents to teach their child skills to help keep them safe from violence – online, at school, at home and in their community.

**It's important that parents communicate openly and often on these subjects.**

For more information on this subject, call your Match Support Specialist. (insert name and phone number here) There are also tools to help children learn how to respond to different situations. We recommend the following resources:

[www.ncpc.org/parents](http://www.ncpc.org/parents)

[www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)

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

[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)

[www.goodtouchbadtouch.com/parents.php#parentssafetypackage](http://www.goodtouchbadtouch.com/parents.php#parentssafetypackage)





## **REQUIRED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:**

Big Brothers Big Sisters staff are required to report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child. Our staff and volunteers are trained to respond if a child tells them about abuse. A report will be filed with authorities.

If you have any further questions or would like more information on violence prevention, please don't hesitate to ask our staff for additional resources.

**If at any time you suspect that your child is being harmed, please contact Big Brothers Big Sisters' staff for support.**

## *About Bullying*

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have [serious, lasting problems](#).

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

### **Types of Bullying**

There are three types of bullying:

- Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:
  - Teasing
  - Name-calling
  - Inappropriate sexual comments
  - Taunting
  - Threatening to cause harm





- Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:
  - Leaving someone out on purpose
  - Telling other children not to be friends with someone
  - Spreading rumors about someone
  - Embarrassing someone in public
- Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:
  - Hitting/kicking/pinching
  - Spitting
  - Tripping/pushing
  - Taking or breaking someone's things
  - Making mean or rude hand gestures

### *The Roles Kids Play*

There are many roles that kids can play. Kids can bully others, they can be bullied, or they may witness bullying. When kids are involved in bullying, they often play more than one role. Sometimes kids may both be bullied and bully others or they may witness other kids being bullied. It is important to understand the multiple roles kids play in order to effectively [prevent](#) and [respond](#) to bullying.

### **Importance of Not Labeling Kids**

When referring to a bullying situation, it is easy to call the kids who bully others "bullies" and those who are targeted "victims," but this may have unintended consequences. When children are labeled as "bullies" or "victims" it may:

- Send the message that the child's behavior cannot change
- Fail to recognize the multiple roles children might play in different bullying situations
- Disregard other factors contributing to the behavior such as peer influence or school climate

Instead of labeling the children involved, focus on the behavior. For instance:

- Instead of calling a child a "bully," refer to them as "the child who bullied"
- Instead of calling a child a "victim," refer to them as "the child who was bullied"
- Instead of calling a child a "bully/victim," refer to them as "the child who was both bullied and bullied others."



## Kids Involved in Bullying

The roles kids play in bullying are not limited to those who bully others and those who are bullied. Some researchers talk about the "circle of bullying" to define both those directly involved in bullying and those who actively or passively assist the behavior or defend against it. Direct roles include:

- **Kids who Bully:** These children engage in bullying behavior towards their peers. There are many [risk factors](#) that may contribute to the child's involvement in the behavior. Often, these students require [support](#) to change their behavior and address any other challenges that may be influencing their behavior.
- **Kids who are Bullied:** These children are the targets of bullying behavior. Some factors put children [at more risk](#) of being bullied, but not all children with these characteristics will be bullied. Sometimes, these children may need [help](#) learning [how to respond to bullying](#).

Even if a child is not directly involved in bullying, they may be contributing to the behavior. Witnessing the behavior may also [affect](#) the child, so it is important for them to learn [what they should do](#) when they see bullying happen. Roles kids play when they witness bullying include:

- **Kids who Assist:** These children may not start the bullying or lead in the bullying behavior, but serve as an "assistant" to children who are bullying. These children may encourage the bullying behavior and occasionally join in.
- **Kids who Reinforce:** These children are not directly involved in the bullying behavior but they give the bullying an audience. They will often laugh or provide support for the children who are engaging in bullying. This may encourage the bullying to continue.
- **Outsiders:** These children remain separate from the bullying situation. They neither reinforce the bullying behavior nor defend the child being bullied. Some may watch what is going on but do not provide feedback about the situation to show they are on anyone's side. Even so, providing an audience may encourage the bullying behavior.
  - These kids often want to help, but don't know how. Learn how to be "[more than a bystander](#)."
- **Kids who Defend:** These children actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child's defense when bullying occurs.

Most kids play more than one role in bullying over time. In some cases, they may be directly involved in bullying as the one bullying others or being bullied and in others they may witness bullying and play an assisting or defending role. Every situation is different. Some kids are both bullied and bully others. It is important to note the multiple roles kids play, because:

- Those who are both bullied and bully others may be at more risk for [negative outcomes](#), such as depression or suicidal ideation.
- It highlights the need to engage all kids in [prevention](#) efforts, not just those who are known to be directly involved



## *How to Talk About Bullying*

Parents, school staff, and other caring adults have a role to play in preventing bullying. They can:

- Help kids [understand bullying](#). Talk about what bullying is and how to stand up to it safely. Tell kids bullying is unacceptable. Make sure kids know how to get help.
- [Keep the lines of communication open](#). Check in with kids often. Listen to them. Know their friends, ask about school, and understand their concerns.
- [Encourage kids to do what they love](#). Special activities, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends, and protect them from bullying behavior.
- [Model how to treat others with kindness and respect](#).

### **Help Kids Understand Bullying**

Kids who know [what bullying is](#) can better identify it. They can talk about bullying if it happens to them or others. Kids need to know ways to safely stand up to bullying and how to get help.

- Encourage kids to speak to a trusted adult if they are bullied or see others being bullied. The adult can give comfort, support, and advice, even if they can't solve the problem directly. Encourage the child to [report bullying](#) if it happens.
- Talk about [how to stand up to kids who bully](#). Give tips, like using humor and saying "stop" directly and confidently. Talk about what to do if those actions don't work, like walking away
- Talk about strategies for staying safe, such as staying near adults or groups of other kids.
- [Urge them to help kids who are bullied](#) by showing kindness or getting help.

### **Keep the Lines of Communication Open**

Research tells us that children really do look to parents and caregivers for advice and help on tough decisions. Sometimes spending 15 minutes a day talking can reassure kids that they can talk to their parents if they have a problem. Start conversations about daily life and feelings with questions like these:

- What was one good thing that happened today? Any bad things?
- What is lunch time like at your school? Who do you sit with? What do you talk about?
- What is it like to ride the school bus?
- What are you good at? What would do you like best about yourself?



Talking about bullying directly is an important step in understanding how the issue might be affecting kids. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but it is important to encourage kids to answer them honestly. Assure kids that they are not alone in addressing any problems that arise.

Start conversations about bullying with questions like these:

- What does “bullying” mean to you?
- Describe what kids who bully are like. Why do you think people bully?
- Who are the adults you trust most when it comes to things like bullying?
- Have you ever felt scared to go to school because you were afraid of bullying? What ways have you tried to change it?
- What do you think parents can do to help stop bullying?
- Have you or your friends left other kids out on purpose? Do you think that was bullying? Why or why not?
- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
- Do you ever see kids at your school being bullied by other kids? How does it make you feel?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who is being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happens again?

Get more ideas for [talking with children](#) about life and about bullying. If concerns come up, [be sure to respond](#).

There are simple ways that parents and caregivers can keep up-to-date with kids’ lives.

- Read class newsletters and school flyers. Talk about them at home.
- Check the school website
- Go to school events
- Meet teachers and school staff

### **Encourage Kids to Do What They Love**

Help kids take part in activities, interests, and hobbies they like. Kids can volunteer, play sports, sing in a chorus, or join a youth group or school club. These activities give kids a chance to have fun and meet others with the same interests. They can build confidence and friendships that help protect kids from bullying.



## **Model How to Treat Others with Kindness and Respect**

Kids learn from adults' actions. By treating others with kindness and respect, adults show the kids in their lives that there is no place for bullying. Even if it seems like they are not paying attention, kids are watching how adults manage stress and conflict, as well as how they treat their friends, colleagues, and families.

### *Support the Kids Involved*

All kids involved in bullying—whether they are bullied, bully others, or see bullying—can be affected. It is important to support all kids involved to make sure the bullying doesn't continue and effects can be minimized.

## **Support Kids Who are Bullied**

**Listen and focus on the child.** Learn what's been going on and show you want to help.

**Assure the child that bullying is not their fault.**

**Know that kids who are bullied may struggle with talking about it.** Consider connecting them with a school counselor, psychologist, or other mental health service.

**Give advice about [what to do](#).** This may involve role-playing and thinking through how the child might react if the bullying occurs again.

**Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied child.** The child, parents, and school or organization may all have valuable input. It may help to:

- Ask the child being bullied what can be done to make him or her feel safe. Remember that changes to routine should be minimized. He or she is not at fault and should not be singled out. For example, consider rearranging classroom or bus seating plans for everyone. If bigger moves are necessary, such as switching classrooms or bus routes, the child who is bullied should not be forced to change.
- Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between schools, organizations, and parents. Discuss the steps that are taken and the limitations around what can be done based on policies and laws. Remember, the [law does not allow school personnel](#) to discuss discipline, consequences, or services given to other children.



**Be persistent.** Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop and consistently support the bullied child.

**Avoid these mistakes:**

- Never tell the child to ignore the bullying.
- Do not blame the child for being bullied. Even if he or she provoked the bullying, no one deserves to be bullied.
- Do not tell the child to physically fight back against the kid who is bullying. It could get the child hurt, suspended, or expelled.
- Parents should resist the urge to contact the other parents involved. It may make matters worse. School or other officials can act as mediators between parents.

**Follow-up.** Show a commitment to making bullying stop. Because bullying is behavior that repeats or has the potential to be repeated, it takes consistent effort to ensure that it stops.

**Address Bullying Behavior**

Parents, school staff, and organizations all have a role to play.

**Make sure the child knows what the problem behavior is.** Young people who bully must learn their behavior is wrong and harms others.

**Show kids that bullying is taken seriously.** Calmly tell the child that bullying will not be tolerated. Model respectful behavior when addressing the problem.

**Work with the child to understand some of the reasons he or she bullied.** For example:

- Sometimes children bully to fit in. These kids can benefit from participating in positive activities. Involvement in sports and clubs can enable them to take leadership roles and make friends without feeling the need to bully.
- Other times kids act out because something else—issues at home, abuse, stress—is going on in their lives. They also may have been bullied. These kids may be in need of additional support, such as [mental health services](#).



**Use consequences to teach.** Consequences that involve learning or building empathy can help prevent future bullying. School staff should remember to follow the [guidelines in their student code of conduct](#) and other policies in developing consequences and assigning discipline. For example, the child who bullied can:

- Lead a class discussion about how to be a good friend.
- Write a story about the effects of bullying or benefits of teamwork.
- Role-play a scenario or make a presentation about the importance of respecting others, the negative effects of gossip, or how to cooperate.
- Do a project about civil rights and bullying.
- Read a book about bullying.
- Make posters for the school about cyberbullying and being smart online.

**Involve the kid who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation.** The goal is to help them see how their actions affect others. For example, the child can:

- Write a letter apologizing to the student who was bullied.
- Do a good deed for the person who was bullied or for others in your community.
- Clean up, repair, or pay for any property they damaged.

**Avoid strategies that don't work or have negative consequences.**

- Zero tolerance or “three strikes, you’re out” strategies don’t work. Suspending or expelling students who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Students and teachers may be less likely to report and address bullying if suspension or expulsion is the consequence.
- Conflict resolution and peer mediation don’t work for bullying. Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. Facing those who have bullied may further upset kids who have been bullied.
- Group treatment for students who bully doesn’t work. Group members tend to reinforce bullying behavior in each other.

**Follow-up.** After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how what they do affects other people. For example, praise acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good friend.

**Support Bystanders Who Witness Bullying** Even if kids are not bullied or bullying others they can [be affected](#) by bullying. Many times, when they see bullying, they may not know what to do to stop it. They may not feel safe stepping in in the moment, but there are many other [steps they can take](#).



## What Kids Can Do

The Questions and Advice Below Can Be Helpful to Any Child Dealing With Bullying, Whether as a Victim, Perpetrator, Supporter or Witness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Are you being bullied? Do you see bullying at your school? There are things you can do to keep yourself and the kids you know safe from bullying.

### Treat Everyone with Respect

Nobody should be mean to others.

- Stop and think before you say or do something that could hurt someone.
- If you feel like being mean to someone, find something else to do. Play a game, watch TV, or talk to a friend.
- Talk to an adult you trust. They can help you find ways to be nicer to others.
- Keep in mind that everyone is different. Not better or worse. Just different.
- If you think you have bullied someone in the past, apologize. Everyone feels better.

### What to Do If You're Bullied

There are things you can do if you are being bullied:

- Look at the kid bullying you and tell him or her to stop in a calm, clear voice. You can also try to laugh it off. This works best if joking is easy for you. It could catch the kid bullying you off guard.
- If speaking up seems too hard or not safe, walk away and stay away. Don't fight back. Find an adult to stop the bullying on the spot.

There are things you can do to stay safe in the future, too.

- Talk to an adult you trust. Don't keep your feelings inside. Telling someone can help you feel less alone. They can help you make a plan to stop the bullying.
- Stay away from places where bullying happens.
- Stay near adults and other kids. Most bullying happens when adults aren't around.

### Stand Up for Others

When you see bullying, there are safe things you can do to make it stop.

- Talk to a parent, teacher, or another adult you trust. Adults need to know when bad things happen so they can help.
- Be kind to the kid being bullied. Show them that you care by trying to include them. Sit with them at lunch or on the bus, talk to them at school, or invite them to do something. Just hanging out with them will help them know they aren't alone.

Not saying anything could make it worse for everyone. The kid who is bullying will think it is ok to keep treating others that way.





## *What is Cyberbullying?*

Cyberbullying is [bullying](#) that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites.

Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.

### **Why Cyberbullying is Different**

Kids who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well. Additionally, kids who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior.

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a kid even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

### **Effects of Cyberbullying**

Cell phones and computers themselves are not to blame for cyberbullying. Social media sites can be used for positive activities, like connecting kids with friends and family, helping students with school, and for entertainment. But these tools can also be used to hurt other people. Whether done in person or through technology, the effects of bullying are similar.

Kids who are cyberbullied are more likely to:

- Use alcohol and drugs
- Skip school
- Experience in-person bullying
- Be unwilling to attend school
- Receive poor grades
- Have lower self-esteem
- Have more health problems



# *Prevent Cyberbullying*



Parents and kids can prevent cyberbullying. Together, they can explore safe ways to use technology.

## **Be Aware of What Your Kids are Doing Online**

Talk with your kids about cyberbullying and other online issues regularly.

- Know the sites your kids visit and their online activities. Ask where they're going, what they're doing, and who they're doing it with.
- Tell your kids that as a responsible parent you may review their online communications if you think there is reason for concern. Installing parental control filtering software or monitoring programs are one option for monitoring your child's online behavior, but do not rely solely on these tools.
- Have a sense of what they do online and in texts. Learn about the sites they like. Try out the devices they use.
- Ask for their passwords, but tell them you'll only use them in case of emergency.
- Ask to "friend" or "follow" your kids on social media sites or ask another trusted adult to do so.
- Encourage your kids to tell you immediately if they, or someone they know, is being cyberbullied. Explain that you will not take away their computers or cell phones if they confide in you about a problem they are having.

## **Establish Rules about Technology Use**

Establish rules about appropriate use of computers, cell phones, and other technology. For example, be clear about what sites they can visit and what they are permitted to do when they're online. Show them how to be safe online.

Help them be smart about what they post or say. Tell them not to share anything that could hurt or embarrass themselves or others. Once something is posted, it is out of their control whether someone else will forward it.

Encourage kids to think about who they want to see the information and pictures they post online. Should complete strangers see it? Real friends only? Friends of friends? Think about how people who aren't friends could use it.

Tell kids to keep their passwords safe and not share them with friends. Sharing passwords can compromise their control over their online identities and activities.



**Understand School Rules:** Some schools have developed [policies](#) on uses of technology that may affect the child's online behavior in and out of the classroom. Ask the school if they have developed a policy.

## Communication Tips for Parents and Care givers

- **Even if you are busy, make the time to talk with your child.** Sometimes the best discussions take place while you are driving the car or cooking supper.
- **Listen to the “Little Stuff.”** If they know you are listening, they are more likely to trust you enough to talk about everything in their life.
- **Listen between the lines.** Because most kids find it hard to talk about things that really matter, you need to listen hard to what they may be trying to say
- **Ask their opinion.** We all like it when someone asks our opinion.

*You don't have to ask about just important issues – ask them simple things too. Would they rather go visit Aunt Denise or Grandma today? Do they prefer McDonalds or Burger King? What do they enjoy doing most with their Big Brother or Big Sister?*



- **Don't interrupt.** Give your children some extra time to explain their opinion or desires, even if you think you know what they are going to say.
- **Catch them doing something good!** Take that opportunity to praise them and tell them that you are proud of them



# Supporting an LGBTQ Child

**Families Supporting an LGBTQ Child**  
*For some parents—birth, foster, or adoptive—learning that a child is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning his or her sexual orientation or gender identity (“LGBTQ”) can be a very difficult juncture. For others, this information is welcomed and recognized as a sign of trust. How a parent responds to their LGBTQ child will have an enormous impact on the child’s healthy development and on the quality of the parent-child relationship.*



## You Are Not Alone

Upon learning that your child is LGBTQ, you may feel a variety of emotions ranging from relief and acceptance to shock, denial, guilt, and anger. It’s important to know that you are not alone in this experience. In fact, approximately one in every four families in this country has a family member who is LGBTQ. Many families struggle in isolation, unaware of community resources to help them. You owe it to your child and to yourself to find the resources, support, and education you may need to move towards understanding and acceptance.

One of the most valuable resources is **Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**. PFLAG offers a volunteer-based network of peer-support chapters around the country (see their website at [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) to find the chapter nearest you).

Most importantly, reassure your child of your unconditional love.

## Show Appreciation for the Strength and Courage It Takes To Come Out

If your child has come out to you, it’s likely that it took her or him a lot of strength and courage to make that disclosure. It’s now up to you to match this with your own courage, commitment, love, and support.

If you learned that your child is LGBTQ from another source, avoid confronting your child. You may want to have a conversation about LGBTQ issues generally so your child knows you are open to him/her confiding in you. Do your best to embrace your child, his or her identity, and his or her decision whether to be open with you.

## Expand Your Knowledge of LGBTQ Issues

Don’t rely on unfounded myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ people. Supportive literature specifically intended for parents of LGBTQ youth can help you develop a better understanding of these issues and a better relationship with your child.

Such resources can be obtained through PFLAG, your local library or bookstore, an LGBT community center (to locate the one nearest you, see the National Association of LGBT Community Centers website at [www.lgbtcenters.org](http://www.lgbtcenters.org)), or the Family Acceptance Project’s website at [familyproject.lafwu.edu](http://familyproject.lafwu.edu).

## Understand the Importance of Your Support

Be mindful that your reaction to your child’s sexual orientation or gender identity will have a major impact on your child’s life. LGBTQ children and youth who are rejected by their parents and families face a significantly higher risk of depression, suicide, and substance abuse compared with LGBTQ youth from accepting families.

Once they understand the importance of their support, many parents of LGBTQ youth find that they eventually develop a stronger, closer relationship with their child.



### **Guidelines and Ground Rules for ALL Program Participants**

These rules are based on in-depth study of mentoring successes and challenges during the last 100+ years since Big Brothers Big Sisters of America began. They are IMPORTANT for ensuring youth safety, adult liability protection, and healthy happy outcomes for all parties.

1. Starting today, for at least one year, Big and Little will meet for a MINIMUM of 6 hours each month, divided into at least 2 meetings, and stay in touch during weeks without in-person visits. Acceptable methods include: phone, voicemail, skype, facebook, text, postcards, letters, etc.
2. Monthly contact between SLO Bigs Staff & EACH program participant will be conducted via phone, email, text or social media. I will reply to ALL Agency contact attempts within 2 business days.
3. SLO Bigs Staff must be notified if a program participant's contact information changes.
4. Big and Little will limit involvement of others during their shared outings, to promote the development of a one-to-one mentoring relationship. Bigs will personally supervise Littles at all times during outings and never leave Little to be supervised by another adult who has not been thoroughly screened by the SLO Bigs Staff and approved by the parent.
5. All sensitive or personal information learned about other program participants can be discussed openly with SLO Bigs Staff, but will otherwise be kept confidential.
6. All child safety concerns, including SUSPECTED abuse or neglect, must be reported immediately to SLO Bigs Staff, who will contact Child Welfare Services when appropriate.
7. Permission from the parent/guardian is required BEFORE all match activities.
8. Permission from SLO Bigs Staff is required before overnight activities, expensive outings or gifts.
9. Big and Little may ONLY participate in over-night activities AFTER 6 months of being matched. Permission from the parent and Agency Staff is required.
10. NO SECRETS are allowed between Big and Little. All social media and electronic communication between Bigs and Littles will be accessible and/or monitored by the parent. All activities shared between Big and Little will be reported to parent/guardians and to SLO Bigs Staff.
11. During match activities, reasonable safety precautions will always be taken to avoid risk or injury to the child. The parent and SLO Bigs staff will be notified if an injury occurs during an outing. If necessary, the Big will seek emergency medical treatment for the Little. Big shall only administer medicine to the Little if parents has previously given clear permission and instructions for doing so.
12. I will strive to communicate openly, respectfully and directly with the other parties of the match, be on-time and give advance notice when changing plans.
13. Big shall not make monetary donations to the family. Donations of services shall be discussed and arranged with SLO Bigs Staff in advance.
14. I will contact SLO Bigs right away if I feel unhappy, uncomfortable, confused, frustrated, disappointed, unsure or concerned about the relationship or the program.
15. When it is time to end the match relationship, I will consider the needs of the other parties and actively participate in the closure procedure, guided by SLO Bigs Staff.
16. I understand and agree to abide by the guidelines and ground rules listed above. I will communicate directly with SLO Bigs staff if I or another program participant are unable to consistently comply for any reason.



### **Guidelines and Ground Rules for Bigs Only**

1. I will maintain automobile liability insurance on any vehicle owned by me which will be used to transport my Little, and I will transport him/her only in vehicles which are covered by an automobile liability insurance policy. I will be aware of and follow all relevant state laws regarding seat belts and car seats.
2. I accept complete responsibility for my actions as a volunteer in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of San Luis Obispo County Community Based program; and, I agree to hold Big Brothers Big Sisters and all members, agents, representatives, and employees of that organization harmless and free from liability for my actions as a volunteer in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.
3. I agree to refrain from smoking, drinking alcohol, or using any mood altering substances or having related paraphernalia loose in my car or in my home when I am with my Little. I understand all medications are to be locked up, or safely put up, when a Little is visiting my home or when medications are in my car and I am transporting my Little.
4. I acknowledge that Big Brothers Big Sister of San Luis Obispo County will not be held liable for any damages, risk or harm to the Little Brother/Little Sister in regard to guns in the household. I agree to place all guns in a locked and safe compartment and to keep all ammunition in a separate, locked compartment.

### **Guidelines and Ground Rules for Parents Only**

1. I will not take away outings with the Big as a means of discipline for my child.
2. I will help my child promptly return all contact attempts by the Big and SLO Bigs Staff.
3. If I need help communicating directly with the Big, obtaining resources for my family or supporting my child academically, I will remember that SLO Bigs Staff is available to assist me.

## **Your Role: We need you to be an active partner!**

**W**e know it takes a special parent/care giver to get a Big Brother or Big Sister for their child.

Parents/care givers are important partners in helping to build a meaningful friendship between their children and volunteers.

### **What you can do to help.**

- Share your concerns, hopes and wishes for your child with your SLO Bigs Match Support Specialist. S/he will tell these to your child's Big and help him/her in planning activities that are fun and educational.



- Help find the best times for outings to occur, and make sure that your child is prepared: proper clothing, ready on time, recently fed, etc.
- Make sure that you know details of each planned activity (and have given your approval in advance), when your child will be picked up and when you can expect them back. Make a point of being home
- Always ask about what the activities were, where they took place, who else was involved and your child's feelings about the visit
- During the first year, monthly contact with your SLO Bigs Match Support Specialist are required. You can discuss your child's experiences: what activities have they been involved in, what does your child say about the outings? What makes you happy about being in the program?
- If concerns or sensitive topics need to be discussed, don't talk about your child with the Big Brother or Big Sister when the child is present. If there is something you think the mentor should know, call him/her when your child is not present.
- Don't ask that siblings be included. This is special for your child. Do participate in events and agency sponsored activity that invite Parents and family members to join in, such as the Volunteer Appreciation Party in April and the Holiday Party in December.
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters are "older friends". They are not substitute parents, baby sitters, disciplinarians, financial support, taxi service, or counselors.
- Time with a Big is special. Don't punish your child by saying they can't see the Big. Often, this one-to-one adult time will actually help your child's overall behavior.
- Be flexible. Remember that the Big Brother or Big Sister is a volunteer, and has a busy schedule too. Both you and the volunteer should make sure to call ahead to cancel any planned visits.
- Help make sure that your child returns phone calls and stays in regular contact with the volunteer. Regular contact is important to the success of the match.
- Overnight outings between the Big Brother/Big Sister and your child are allowed AFTER the first 6 months of the match, and then only after a consultation with a SLO Bigs Match Support Staff member.



- Give it time: This relationship needs time to develop – at least three months – so don't judge it too quickly.
- Please do not assume that the volunteer has lots of money and will always take your child out to eat. Make sure the Little eats before the outing and/or brings a snack...unless the Big has already planned to include a meal as part of the outing.

*Remember, we all have the same goal – the health and well-being of your child!*

**In summary, the top rules are:**

- 1) Know what your child is doing with their Big Brother or Big Sister**
- 2) Communicate regularly with SLO BIGS staff regarding ANY concerns**

SLO Phone: (805) 781-3226

PASO Phone: (805) 239-3534

Text: (805) 242-5964:

Facebook: SLO Bigs (matches)

Email: [Sheena@slobigs.org](mailto:Sheena@slobigs.org) or [Tatiana@slobigs.org](mailto:Tatiana@slobigs.org)

**From everyone at Big Brothers Big Sisters—Thank You.**

