

Common Concerns for Bigs

What if my help isn't wanted?

It's not easy to trust a stranger, especially if you're a young person who's had a lot of bad experiences with adults in the past. It may take time and effort to build trust. Don't interpret caution as a rejection. A Little may not show it – in fact, he or she may not even know it fully – but your help is definitely wanted.

What if something really serious comes up?

While most mentoring relationships develop and flourish without serious problems, things do happen. Bigs have an important role, but that role does not include medical or psychological treatment, or family counseling. There are support systems in place for real emergencies. The most a Big is expected to do – and should do – is share this information with your match support specialist. Your MSS can help guide your Little to the appropriate source of professional help and help you be supportive of your Little.

What if I'm too different to relate well?

Many first-time volunteers worry that differences in age, race, religion, education, or gender will be insurmountable barriers. Actually, most experienced Bigs report that mentoring a Little from a different background broadened their own horizons and deepened their understanding of other people and cultures.

What if for some reason I can't mentor anymore?

This is important to consider. Mentoring is a serious commitment. It will do far more harm than good to enter a Little's life, build up trust, and then abandon the relationship. Be as honest as possible with yourself when enrolling to be a Big – for everyone's sake. If you aren't sure about in-depth mentoring, try one of the many shorter-term alternatives, such as tutoring, or one-time projects. If you need to end the match early because of life changes, you can work with your match support specialist to develop ideas to wrap up the match with your Little in a positive manner so your Little receives closure.

What if I do something wrong?

If you are there for your Little no matter what, if you listen and really hear what's being said, and if you do your best to counsel and not to judge, you will have done everything right. Some Littles are more ready than others for a Big. Some may test a Big's commitment. Try not to take such behavior personally. Just keep trying your best and keep doing the right things. Gauge your success by your actions, not your Little's.

What if the person I mentor is a disappointment?

A better question is, "What encouragement can I give my Little to be a healthier person?" Bigs are in the business of helping young people achieve their fullest potential. You can be sure that mistakes will be made. You won't be able to help a Little learn from a mistake if you can't handle it yourself.