



**Big Brothers
Big Sisters.®**

OF NORTHWESTERN
MICHIGAN

BIG FUTURES

Mentoring Teens



SUPPORTING YOUR TEEN LITTLE



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwestern Michigan helps Littles dream big and provides support to turn those big dreams into bright futures. Whether you've been matched with your Little for years and are now transitioning into their teens, or you are entering a new match relationship, it is our goal to empower you with the following tips and resources specifically designed to support your Little through adolescence and young adulthood as they begin to expand their knowledge of the larger world and find their unique place within it.

Individualized Match Growth Plan

Tailored to teens to guide match goals and build action steps to achieve them.

Big Futures Events

Facilitated by Bigs mentors and community partners, this series of outcome-oriented events aim at addressing the school-to-workforce pipeline. Delve deeper into topics related to personal finances, college and financial aid applications, health and wellness, and more.

Workplace Mentoring

Through tours of local businesses and one-to-one meetings with community professionals in a career setting of their choice, youth explore career options and learn firsthand the skills they need to succeed in business.

Match Support age 18+

The Bigs' team continues to support matches beyond age 18. A mentor in a young adult's life is a game changer for success as they pursue continued education and career paths. By providing additional resources and support, this extended match mentoring helps youth navigate one of the most pivotal times in their lives – the transition into young adulthood.

COMMUNICATING WITH TEENS



The first step in supporting your Little through their teens is adapting to a style of communication that is well received by them and reflects the boundaries in your relationship created by their increasing independence. Discovering new and different approaches to communicating effectively with one another will be a learning experience for you both.

Your teen Little needs you now more than ever, but they are also understandably striving toward independence. They are beginning to make decisions about things that have real consequence, while some are simultaneously not able to regulate their emotions, sometimes resulting in impulsive decisions and risk-taking. The goal is to communicate and listen in a way that respects their independent thinking and offer guidance only when requested.

- Recognize an invitation to communicate when it is presented to you. A simple comment about something that happened in their day is them reaching out
- Show interest in what interests them, even if the subject does not interest you
- Seek their opinion without pressure or prying
- Listen with the intent to understand. Show empathy and a genuine interest in their point of view

- Verbally acknowledge their feelings without judgment, to show you understand their point of view, even if you disagree
- Respond in a way your Little will hear by using positive and productive words without strong physical and verbal reactions
- If they offer up something that is challenging for them, ask what they may want or need from you in the conversation, such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings or help solving a problem
- Things to avoid are unsolicited instructions or advice, and interrogation by firing questions at them

Effective communication will help you and your Little feel connected in your match relationship, and lays the foundation for developing goals toward exploring their potential.

CAREER EXPLORATION



Guide your Little along the career planning process from identifying their interests and skills to exploring specific careers and the education or training requirements.

ASSESSING INTERESTS AND SKILLS

Meaningful career exploration for young people involves reflecting on their interests, skills and preferences. Teens may need your help recognizing their capabilities, especially soft skills like listening, relationship-building or other people skills. Encourage your Little to engage in self-discovery by answering questions like:

- Which subjects do I most enjoy and excel in?
- What are my skills?
- What kind of things do I like to do outside of school?
- What kind of activities excite and energize me?
- When do I feel at my best?
- What is something I can teach someone else?
- Who do I look up to and why?

Online personality tests can help them understand what comes easily and naturally to them. Try www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test or www.truity.com/. Online tools are also available for interest assessments, such as www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/careers/interest-assessment.aspx.

Identify their preferences by asking questions such as whether they would enjoy working with groups of people or alone. Do they enjoy working with things, people or information? And lastly, whether they gravitate more toward leading, instructing, creating, or fixing.

CAREER RESEARCH TOOLS

With knowledge of your Little's interests, preferences and confidence in their skills, they are on the path to building a sense of purpose and a rewarding career. Explore careers of interest to them utilizing the research tools below.

- Holland Code Career Test: www.truity.com/test/holland-code-career-test

- US Department of Labor: www.careeronestop.org/GetMyFuture/default.aspx?frd=true
- Newton's Road STEM Career Investigator: www.nwmicareers.org/
- The book *What Color is Your Parachute? for teens*, by Carol Christen and Richard Bolles
- This Student Road Map outlines ideas and activities for you and your Little to encourage career exploration each year of middle through high school:
drive.google.com/file/d/1i0WeybD7gF_Xu3ZZUMyjSqGtBwOKo8P4/view?usp=sharing

An important component of your career exploration conversation is understanding realistic employment opportunities in the market of their choosing. To ensure appropriate expectations, research which careers are in demand, have the largest employment, or are declining.

WORKPLACE MENTORING

The Bigs team is available to engage Littles with tours of local businesses and one-to-one meetings with community professionals in a career setting of their choice. Youth learn firsthand the skills they would need to succeed in that business and can explore career options that may have otherwise been unknown to them. Through relationships with our local professionals, youth experience what it means to work for a business, learn professional etiquette and observe what educational requirements are needed to achieve professional success. Contact your Mentoring Specialist for details.

WORKFORCE READINESS

Building job readiness skills prepares teens for the real world when entering the workforce. Guide your Little through the following employability skills: works well with others, makes decisions, solves problems, good learner, honest, self-motivated, has integrity, responsible, polite, good communicator, friendly, confident, respectful and flexible. Your Little will thrive in their job with comprehension of these important soft skills and an opportunity to practice them.

Early work experiences, such as summer jobs and internships provide hands-on learning opportunities to provide real work experience, build a resume and develop workforce readiness skills. Visit wwwIndeed.com or [Google](#) for available internships and positions in our community.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION



Discovering potential career fields and understanding the associated educational or training requirements are two strong benefits of career exploration exercises at a young age. With your support, your Little will learn firsthand the connection between educational attainment and access to career opportunities. Together, you can explore continued education options to obtain their career goals.

COLLEGE

If a college degree is the goal for your Little, in addition to exploring 4 year schools also consider community college options, such as [Northwestern Michigan College](#) or [North Central Michigan College](#). Benefits of community college include affordable tuition, smaller class sizes and affordable housing. In some instances, their

chosen career path may only require an Associate's degree. Virtual or in-person campus tours are a great introduction to our local community colleges.

When ready to research specific school options, visit www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org/ as a helpful tool for college searches based on area of study, location, test scores, type of school, etc. The site also includes a college search step-by-step guide: www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/how-to-find-your-college-fit/college-search-step-by-step.

The college preparation and application processes can be daunting. Along with their parents, encourage your Little to be proactive and stay organized by utilizing these Junior Year and Senior Year of high school checklists:

- www.nacacfairs.org/learn/apply/preparing-for-college-junior-check-list/
- www.nacacfairs.org/learn/apply/preparing-for-college-senior-checklist/

In addition to information on scholarship and financial aid assistance from High School counselors, you may find these resources helpful:

- www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/how-to-find-and-secure-scholarships-for-college
- www.studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/scholarships
- www.scholarships.com/financial-aid/college-scholarships/

The Bigs team is available to connect students to community resources for ACT preparation and FAFSA application assistance. Contact your Mentoring Specialist for details.

TRADE SCHOOL

A trade or vocational school focuses on learning a specific skill set needed to accomplish a particular task. The curriculum includes only coursework that pertains to the student's career choice. The value of a trade school education could be higher now more than ever, with a current demand for new employees in skilled trades.

Explore skilled trades and schools utilizing the research tools below.

- www.onlineschoolscenter.com/30-high-paying-trade-school-degrees/
- www.rwm.org/states/michigan-trade-schools/
- www.onlineschoolscenter.com/directory-of-online-trade-and-vocation-schools/
- www.yourfreecareertest.com/career-tests/free-trade-school-career-test/

Learn more about trade school scholarships and financial assistance at www.rwm.org/financial-aid-for-trade-school/. Contact your Mentoring Specialist for community resources for FAFSA application assistance.

ADULT SKILLS



POSITIVE DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making comes with encouragement, practice and positive reinforcement. When faced with a challenge, involve your Little in identifying the root of the challenge, have them list the pros and cons and encourage their

independent thinking in brainstorming possible solutions. After deciding on a solution, they can create an action plan to take positive steps toward that end. As an added bonus, as teens own their responsibility in a situation and work toward positive solutions, they also build their confidence.

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND TIME MANAGEMENT

One organizational style does not fit all. But learning organizational and time management skills now and what tools work best for them will not only help them with school assignments and due dates, but will be utilized as adults in any profession. Written lists, calendar planners and color-coded folders can be helpful, as well as using their favorite device to track To Do lists, due dates, set alarms and create reminders. Practice time management skills by picking one day each week to look ahead to appointments, deadlines and extra-curricular activities to create a plan for the week. Set goals and prioritize responsibilities and activities.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Teens today utilize social media for most communication with their peers, resulting in fewer opportunities to demonstrate proper communication as adults. Practice professional email and letter writing, and speaking with adults in-person or via phone. Communication etiquette includes responding promptly to messages, remembering and referencing names, speaking with confidence, and how to listen. Demonstrate proper body language, including a firm handshake and looking a person in the eye when speaking to them.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Basic budgeting skills are not taught in most schools but are critical for a young adult's long-term financial health. Teach them how to create and adhere to a budget, how to open a bank account and build credit and then use it responsibly. Working teens will also benefit from understanding tax requirements and how to file. For tips and to learn more, visit:

- www.bettermoneyhabits.bankofamerica.com/en/personal-banking/teaching-children-how-to-budget
- www.teenfinancialfreedom.com/10-tips-on-budgeting-for-teens/
- www.launchcu.com/blog/credit-tips-for-teens/

VEHICLE CARE AND DRIVING SAFETY

Basic vehicle maintenance is a valuable tool that your Little will use for a lifetime. Demonstrate simple maintenance tips such as checking and changing the oil, checking the coolant and air pressure, changing a flat tire, and jump starting a battery. Driving safety is critical as well. Talk with them about the importance of driving without distractions (device or otherwise), provide tips on winter driving, and what to do in case of an emergency.

DINING ETIQUETTE

Enjoy a shared meal together to demonstrate proper dining etiquette. There are many table "rules" of which teens may not be aware. Such as: Leave the phone or device away from the dining area. Unfold your napkin and place in your lap. Wait until everyone is seated and served to begin eating. Pass food from the left to the right. Do not stretch across the table, crossing other guests, to reach food or condiments. Identify which utensils to use for which purpose. When dining out, provide a proper tip for the server. Practice makes perfect!

LIVING ON THEIR OWN

Older teens may dream of the day when they can rent their first apartment. Encourage realistic preparation for this important step into adulthood by discussing the logistics of rentals, such as the responsibilities of the tenant versus those of a landlord. Explain what a lease is and what it contains. Create a mock budget with typical monthly rent and utility expenses, as well as the costs associated with moving and setting up a household. Designing their path toward independence will be within better reach with realistic expectations and ample preparation.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Home maintenance skills are another great activity for older teens looking forward to living on their own. From home appliance tune-ups, to furnace filter changes and doing their own laundry – the home maintenance to do list is never ending. Involving your Little in tasks around your home may give them a boost of confidence to practice adult responsibilities. You can access a list of ideas at www.bhg.com/home-improvement/advice/home-maintenance-checklist/.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



HEALTHY EATING AND EXERCISE

Introducing healthy eating habits can start with a trip together to the grocery store and lessons in food preparation in the kitchen. Involve your Little in the grocery selection and teach them to make healthy choices by providing opportunities to select foods based on their nutritional value. You can combine a lesson in how to shop for groceries with a financial lesson by creating a budget before you go. Reinforce healthy habits, such as eating three balanced meals a day, with healthy snacks and drinking plenty of water. Exercise together with physical activity they enjoy. Adolescents need at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for healthy weight during growth.

Experiment in the kitchen together with recipes that utilize healthy ingredients you have on hand by visiting www.supercook.com/#/ingredients.

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH

Teens can be especially vulnerable to mental health problems. Promoting their psychological well-being during adolescence provides the productive building blocks for their mental-emotional health as an adult. The following prevention activities aim to strengthen their capacity to regulate emotions, enhance alternatives to risk-taking behaviors and build resilience for difficult situations and promote supportive social networks.

- Exercise and eat a healthy diet
- Consistently get a good night's sleep
- Have a sense of achievement
- Find a positive community group and experience an accepted, valued feeling of belonging
- Avoid alcohol or drugs

- Deal with challenges as they arise, rather than letting them build up

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Personal hygiene is a sensitive topic. With support of the parent, you can approach this conversation celebrating their growth and entrance into a new and exciting stage of their lives. Use the common issue of teen preparedness to open a discussion about the age when acne and perspiration may become a challenge, the chemical change in perspiration at that age, and how important hygiene is in preventing problems. This leads naturally into a general conversation about cleanliness.

MATCH GROWTH PLAN—TEENS



By helping your teen Little learn how to select and achieve goals now, you're helping them develop tools for successful goal setting as adults. Not only is goal setting important for your Little's development, but it can also be great for relationship development within your match. For example, working on Match Goals with your Little can help with activity planning, promote bonding through the shared experience of trying something new together, increase opportunities for role modeling and demonstrating your role as a mentor, and shake things up from your normal routine.

This Match Growth Plan can help guide you as you set goals and build action steps for achieving your goals together as a match. Your Mentoring Specialist is available to work with you and your Little as needed to set appropriate goals for growth in your match, and plan action steps to achieve them. It's also important to communicate with the Parent/Guardian who may have suggestions for areas they would like to see their child grow and develop. Consider taking a moment to ask for their feedback and use the information to shape the goals you and your Little set together.

GROWTH GOALS

Career and Education Exploration

- Assessing Interests & Skills
- Career Research
- College or Trade School Research
- College Applications
- Workplace Visits
- Workforce Readiness
- Other: _____

Adult Skills

- Positive Decision-Making
- Organizational Skills
- Time Management
- Communication Skills
- Financial Health
- Vehicle Care & Driving Safety
- Other: _____

Healthy Lifestyle

- Healthy Eating
- Exercise
- Promoting Mental Health
- Home Maintenance
- Other: _____

ACTION STEPS

When setting goals, it's important to make a plan for how you will work to accomplish them. Write the goals you selected together and then outline three actions for each goal.

Career and Education Goal: _____

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Adult Skills Goal: _____

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Healthy Lifestyle Goal: _____

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3