

# #BIGPRIDE



## **I'm Interested in Becoming a Big...**

### How do I know BBBS is a safe space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community?

We pride ourselves on making Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Louisiana a safe place for everyone, including the LGBTQIA+ community. Just as we welcome youth and families from a beautifully diverse array of backgrounds, we welcome volunteers from every background as well. We believe that diversity and uniqueness are assets and by modeling this for youth, we help encourage them to be and believe in themselves. In August 2020, we partnered with Altria to specifically help us better serve LGBTQIA+ youth and we continue this mission today. We recognize that the bias that exists in our culture puts LGBTQIA+ youth (and adults) at a greater risk for negative health and safety outcomes, such as depression, bullying, homelessness, suicidality, and substance abuse. We also know that the best protective factor against these risks is for a youth to have a positive, supportive, consistent adult in their life. Be part of the solution by being a Big!

### Your organization is called "Big Brothers Big Sisters", can I be a mentor if I identify as trans, non-binary, or gender fluid?

Absolutely! At Big Brothers Big Sisters, we are looking for a diverse group of volunteers, including age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and ability. The youth and adults in our program represent a diverse array of all the above. Likely we have a young person waiting for a Big just like you!

### Will you use my preferred pronouns?

You bet!

### If I identify as LGBTQIA+, do I have to be matched with a LGBTQIA+ Little?

Nope! When we match our Bigs and Littles, we take numerous factors into consideration including personalities, location, aspirations, likes/dislikes, personal preferences, and life experiences, to make sure our matches are successful from the start. Your Enrollment Specialist will talk to you about your preferences for being matched so we ensure it's a great fit for everyone.

### Do I need to identify as a LGBTQIA+ to be matched with an LGBTQIA+ Little?

Not at all! We have many wonderful Bigs that are LGBTQIA+ Allies.

### How can I become an LGBTQIA+ Ally within BBBS?

Thank you for asking! Allies make a huge difference in the community and in our program! If you are interested in becoming a Big and are excited to be matched with a LGBTQ Little, please let us know! In addition, if you know any fantastic role models in the LGBTQ community that you believe would be interested in becoming a Big themselves, we would love to talk with them about the program. Please help connect us!

### If I identify as trans or non-binary, would I be matched with a Little Sister or Little Brother?

Upon matching, we would first consider your preferences and comfort level that you discussed with your Enrollment Specialist during your interview. We then consider the needs and preferences of our waiting Littles to determine who may be the best fit for you. With every match, we first call and discuss the potential match with the mentor, and then (if mentor says "yes" to the match), we call and discuss the match with the family. It is important to us that everyone in a match will be loved and respected for being themselves.

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## Conversations with my Little.....

Will there be a consistent staff person that I can rely on for any issues that arise during my match?

Yes! This is one of our areas of expertise. Each match is assigned a Match Relationship Specialist, who will introduce you to your match, check-in with you by phone at least once per month, and will provide ongoing insight, training, coaching, and encouragement specific to your match experience. We highly encourage you to use their expertise to help navigate all questions that you may have.

What are appropriate boundaries for conversations regarding gender identity and orientation with my Little (either mine, theirs, or my opinion of others')?

It varies. When in doubt, our recommendation is to let the youth lead and for the Big to follow. We would rather youth share their ideas and opinions with their Big and avoid situations where a Big might push their own ideologies on the child. We are here to help youth find and use their voice, and to walk along side them as they develop their own unique opinions, views, and identity. When any potentially sensitive topic arises within a match (sexual orientation, religion, politics, etc.), we typically ask that you have a discussion with the Little's guardians about it, just to make sure that everyone is on the same page and comfort level with the topics being discussed. At the same time, we want to ensure a safe space for youth to talk about what may be on their mind, particularly if they worry about how their parent may respond. We take each situation case by case; this is an example of when you should reach out to your Match Relationship Specialist to discuss what is going on and explore options for the best way to proceed, putting the youth's safety and needs first.

Can I share my own experiences of "coming out" with my Little?

Likely! If you feel that sharing this experience would be beneficial to your Little, please reach out to your Match Relationship Specialist first to discuss boundaries, possible questions that may arise, how to best handle this conversation, and general appropriateness considering the child's age, maturity, attention span, etc. Every match is unique, and your Match Support Specialist is an expert on your match.

What if my Little discloses to me that they are questioning or identify as LGBTQIA+/non-binary? Do I tell their family and/or the agency? What if I know their parents are not supportive and/or they are not safe at home if they were to disclose to their family?

First, this says a lot about the trust you have built with this young person. Great job creating a safe and supportive space for them to open up to you! Approach this conversation with compassion, confidence, trust, and acceptance. Be an active and engaged listener and avoid premature problem solving. Ask questions to learn more about who they have told or plan to tell and ask what you can do to be supportive. In our program, we ask matches to share all information with your Match Relationship Specialist, but this information should not necessarily be shared with the parent. Be open with your Match Relationship Specialist and together with the youth we will discuss options for moving forward that put the youth front and center. Our confidentiality policy protects youth coming out and when signing it, parents acknowledge that this information may not be shared with them. Your Match Relationship Specialist is trained in these areas and is the best tool for your match to help you navigate these questions, even if speaking in the hypothetical.

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I've been accepted into the program and am ready to be matched, but I'm wondering if the family will accept me?

This is where our highly trained Match Relationship Specialists come in! They are experts at creating matches that are healthy and successful for all match parties from the start. Your safety and comfort is a priority, and we would not make a match in which we did not feel that you would be accepted for who you are. Before beginning a match, we'll discuss the potential Little with you, and then share info about you with the parent and youth. It is important that everyone feels they can be open and be themselves with each other and be welcomed and respected. We use this process with every match in our program for this reason. If there is something about the youth or family you think may not be a good fit, please share that with us during our matching process.

I'm Curious about my Privacy.....

Why does BBBS ask about my orientation and gender?

As a part of our enrollment and interview process, we ask all volunteer applicants about their gender and orientation, in addition to asking about loads of other things too. The reason we ask is so we can discuss matching preferences with both the Little, their family, and you as the Big. We also ask our family's several questions about their preferences for a Big for their child, to ensure a successful, healthy, happy, comfortable match for everyone involved. It is important to us that everyone can be their authentic self and be accepted as they are.

If I, as a Big, disclose my gender identity or orientation to the agency, who will this information be shared with? Will the family of a Little know? What if I identify as LGBTQIA+, but I am not "out" in my own personal circle?

Any information that you share about your gender identity or orientation is protected under our confidentiality policy. We will not share this information with anyone outside of the agency without your explicit, written consent. With that in mind, the Little that you would be matched with and the family of this Little are considered part of the agency. We share information with the Big and Little about each other prior to matching to ensure everyone feels comfortable with the match and can be themselves without fear of judgment from one another. If you have concerns about sharing your sexual orientation or gender identity with the family, please talk with us about this so we can discuss the best path forward.

What if I identify as LGBTQIA+, but I am not comfortable disclosing this to the agency during an interview to be a Big?

We do encourage you to be as open and honest about yourself as possible during the interview with your Enrollment Specialist, as this is how we have such wonderful success in making positive and long-lasting match relationships. Knowing that you identify as LGBTQIA+ would help us make the best match for both you and a child, as we can ensure that you are matched with a family that appreciates and respects you, for you. However, if you are not comfortable disclosing this during an interview, that is absolutely your right.

What confidentiality policies do you have in place regarding LGBTQIA+ Bigs, Littles, families, and matches?

All Bigs, Littles, families, and matches are covered under our confidentiality policies. These state that any information learned about you in the interview process, matching process, or during a match, is held confidential within the agency and not shared outside of the agency.