



BIG PAL ORIENTATION

About Big Pals Little Pals

Mission - We match children with adult mentors in a fun, community-based mentoring program to spark positive growth and confidence.

How we do it - We match children with caring and inspiring adult mentors in a professionally-supported mentor relationship. Mentoring programs like Big Pals-Little Pals help children develop healthier attitudes and establish worthwhile goals. Matches are encouraged to participate in fun activities together and, in time, a friendship develops.

History - BPLP was founded in 1972 as a Big Brothers agency to serve boys who were growing up without a father. Several years into the program, the organization expanded to include girls, as well. In 1988, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Columbus became Big Pals-Little Pals of Greater Columbus due to the rising cost of affiliation fees to the national organization. Then, in 2019, BPLP officially expanded to serve all children, regardless of family structure or background.

The kids we serve - We serve any and all children, age 6 to 19, who live in the Columbus area and are in need of a caring, inspiring mentor.

Funding - We receive majority of our funding from the Columbus Area United Way. The remaining funds come from the annual Bowl-A-Thon event, grants and individual and corporate donations. This allows us to provide our services at no-cost.

Staff - Karmen Thompson is the Executive Director (and only staff member!) at BPLP. The members of the Board of Directors also take on additional tasks at the agency from time to time.

Becoming a Big Pal

Volunteer Job Description

Role: BPs must take the lead in supporting a young person through an on-going, one-to-one relationship. BPs serve as a positive role model and friend. BPs build the relationship by planning and participating in activities together. BPs strive for mutual respect, build self-esteem and motivation. BPs help set goals and work toward accomplishing them.

Desirable Qualities: BPs must be a willing listener, be encouraging and supportive, be patient and flexible, and be tolerant and respectful of individual differences.

Benefits: BPs receive personal fulfillment through contribution to the community and individuals. BPs receive satisfaction in helping someone mature, progress and achieve goals. BPs receive training sessions and periodic group activities. BPs receive personal ongoing support and assistance to help the match succeed.

Big Pal eligibility - Our volunteers are 19 or older, and live the Columbus area. They need to be responsible, trustworthy and of good character to serve as a role model for the kids in the program.

Information gathering - Before being accepted as a Big Pal (BP), applicants must pass thorough criminal and driving background checks, provide 3 references, and complete an in-person interview at the applicant's home. All roommates and family members over the age of 18 who live with the applicant are also subject to a criminal history background check. This information will be shared with a member of the Board of Directors who has been appointed as the Safety Chair. Together, the Safety Chair and staff will approve the applicant.

What makes a good Big Pal - The best BPs are regular, good-hearted people who make an effort to connect with their Little Pals (LP) and take an interest in the LP's future. BPs show a child that no matter how difficult things get at times, there is always someone who cares about them.

Steps to effective mentoring:

1. Find out what your LP likes to do and the things that they are interested in.
2. Spend time doing what matters to your LP because your LP matters to you.
3. Your investment of time will lead to influential conversations.

Becoming a Little Pal

How kids get involved - Kids are referred to our program by their parents/guardians, school staff or counselors.

After filling out the application, the parent/guardian and child come to the office for an in-person interview so we can get to know the family and understand what kind of person will make the best BP for the child. Because we receive more kid applications than volunteers, we do have a waiting list of kids who are ready to be matched once the right BP comes along!

Making the Match

How long before I'm matched? - Once an applicant turns in the application, we try to schedule the in-person interview right away. After that, we'll run background checks and contact references, which can take 1-3 weeks (depending on how fast the references get back to us!).

Because we have more LP applicants waiting to be matched than BPs, we can usually match a BP shortly after they are accepted. LPs, however, can wait up to 2 years for a BP. Boys, in particular, tend to wait quite a long time.

Review of information and presentation - After getting to know the BP, we look through the files of kids on the waiting list. We compare interests, personalities and match preferences. Once we find a BP and LP who we think will be a good fit, we'll call the BP to present the information. If the BP accepts this possible match, we call the LP's parent/guardian to present the BP. When the parent/guardian accepts, we schedule a time for a Match Meeting!

Match Meeting - The first time a BP, LP and LP's parent/guardian meet is called the Match Meeting. We allow time for introductions, fill out the Match Agreements, exchange contact information, and the BP and LP plan their first outing, which often takes place right after the meeting.

Spending Time Together and Making Plans

Frequency of outings - We ask that matches meet once a week for 1-2 hours. Understandably, this can't always happen. If you have to skip a week once in a while, that's fine! As long as you try to maintain a regular schedule and communicate with your LP's parent/guardian, don't worry.

Planning outings - Especially in the beginning of the match, BPs will need to be responsible for planning outings. Talk with your LP to get ideas of things to try together. Some kids can be shy about sharing ideas, but don't take that as disinterest in spending time together. Let your LP know they should help pick activities! If you are still at a loss of what to do, check out the "Big & Little Pal Resources" tab on our website or contact BPLP staff for suggestions. We'll also give you lists of activity ideas when you're matched. Always get parent/guardian's permission before doing any activity!

Try to decide on an activity and day in advance so you can get the parent/guardian's permission and ensure that day/time works for the family. Some matches have a standing appointment for their outings, getting together the same day and time each week. You can do whatever works best for you and your LP.

Monthly match activities - Every month, BPLP staff plans an activity to give matches a chance to try something new or educational. All matches are invited and the activity is free of cost to matches. Information about these events will be shared through email and Facebook.

Financial considerations of outings - Plan activities that don't cost money and focus on just spending time together. Most of the time, you can do things you would ordinarily do on any given day - just include your LP! Remember that what LPs need most is time and attention.

Out of town outings - Sometimes BPs and LPs need to get out of town! You and your LP are welcome to travel together after your match relationship has been established and everyone (including the parent/guardian) feels comfortable with the plan. If you are travelling outside of Platte, Boone, Butler, Colfax, Madison, Merrick, Nance, Polk or Stanton counties, there is a form that needs to be completed prior to the activity taking place.

Match Support

Purpose - To ensure the success and safety of the match, as well as provide assistance, our staff will contact BPs and alternate contacts between LPs and the parent/guardian. Contacts can be on the phone, email, text or in person.

Frequency - Contacts will be done quarterly or more frequently as necessary to address concerns or issues.

Closing a Match

How to close a match - Matches need to close for a variety of reasons, but we hope that most matches only close because the child is aging out of the program!

It is important for kids to have closure when the match comes to an end. If you feel the match needs to close, please contact BPLP staff first to share your situation or concerns. Then we ask that you let the parent/guardian and LP know you think the match needs to close and meet for a final outing. Do not fade away without warning.

When do matches close - Matches are “set up” to stay together until LP graduates high school, but we ask for at least a minimum of 1 year. Research shows that mentor relationships that last less than a year actually do more harm to the child than if they had not been matched at all. Of course, we love to see matches stay together longer than 1 year. Many BPs and LPs are matched for 10+ years!

Contact after a closure - We love when BPs and LPs remain in each other's lives after the match is closed. Many matches become like family and share important life events together, keeping in contact for many years.

Rematching - If a BP or LP wishes to be matched again after their initial match closes, they can be considered for a “rematch” with a new BP/LP.

Safety

Training - BPLP staff will send BPs training materials in the mail for the first 6 months of the match. Additional training materials and relevant resources will be shared on the agency website (bigpals.org, under the menu item "Resources for Big & Little Pals"). BPs are welcome to reach out to staff at any time to request additional information or training for specific topics as needed.

Match support - Please contact staff if you ever have questions, concerns, issues or suspicions involving your LP or LP's family. The BPLP staff has been trained in child safety and is there to help work through problems that come up in a match. Staff will contact matches 2 weeks after the match begins and monthly thereafter for the first year. After one year, matches will be contacted quarterly until closure.

Abuse or suspected abuse - The state of Nebraska considers anyone and everyone who observes or even suspects a child is being abused or neglected is a mandatory reporter. The number for the Abuse & Neglect Hotline is **1-800-652-1999**. You need to make a report as soon as you can. Even if you just suspect abuse or neglect, you need to make the call.

If the child is in imminent danger, you should call 911 immediately.

Other safety guidelines

- **Alcohol, tobacco, drug use** - BPs are prohibited from consuming alcohol before or during an outing with LP. BPs are prohibited from using tobacco products during an outing with LP and are strongly encouraged to refrain from using tobacco products before an outing with LP. BPs are prohibited from any drug use while active in the program. If attending an activity where alcohol may be present (e.g. sporting event, concert), BP should discuss with parent/guardian beforehand. If the match encounters a person behaving inappropriately, LP should be removed from the situation.
- **Firearm safety** - Please ensure that all firearms and weapons are secured and locked away before each time your LP visits your home. Hunting and use of weapons are not appropriate match activities.
- **Gifts** - Gifts may be exchanged between LPs and BPs only for special occasions such as holidays or birthdays. Gifts should not cost more than \$20. If a match participant is in need of an item, staff should be contacted to provide a referral for a service.
- **High-risk activities** - If you and your LP would like participate in an activity with higher-than-average risks (e.g. swimming without a lifeguard on duty, rock climbing, boating, hunting), P/G must give direct permission, and be aware of the details and location of the activity. P/G must be easily accessible by phone during the activity. BP should ensure LP has the necessary skills to participate in activities.
- **Media** - BP must provide supervision to LP when LP uses a computer or smart phone to ensure only appropriate content is viewed. BP should be mindful of content in any movies, shows, video games or other materials viewed during an outing.

- *Money* - It is never appropriate for BP and parent/guardian to lend money to one another.
- *Restrooms, locker/changing rooms* - When you or your LP need to use restroom while on an outing, please wait outside of the restroom and do not enter the restroom at the same time. This is simply a safety precaution. Similarly, if you participate in an activity that requires a change of clothing (i.e. changing into swimsuits), you will need to change in separate areas.
- *Overnights* - The Big Pals-Little Pals organization does not allow overnight activities under any circumstance.
- *Physical contact* - Appropriate physical contact (i.e. side hugs, shaking hands, patting on the shoulder, high fives) is permitted. Hugs are allowable when discussed beforehand and direct verbal permission has been given before each hug. Some people like to hug and others do not, so those boundaries must be respected. It is important to note that granting permission for appropriate physical contact at an earlier time does not mean permission would be necessarily granted at a later time. / There are forms of physical contact that are not permitted in the program. Engaging in inappropriate contact can result in disciplinary action including reporting to authorities and closure of the match. Examples of inappropriate contact include, but are not limited to: Tickling, wrestling, punching, pinching, backrubs, massages, asking a child to sit on an adult's lap and kissing of any kind (including on the cheek, forehead or hand). / There are other behaviors that are not permitted in the program and can result in closure of the match and possible disciplinary action. Examples of other inappropriate behaviors include, but are not limited to: Hostility or aversion toward any individual, demeaning or exploitative behavior of either a sexual or nonsexual nature, threats of any nature, denigration of LP or LP's family, denigration of a political or religious institution, and intentional violation of any law.
- *Siblings, family members and friends* - Do not allow your LP to bring siblings, friends or other people along on outings. Your time together should be one-on-one. Having more than one child to look after on an outing would likely leave the BP serving as a babysitter. If your LP asks to bring along a friend or sibling, kindly remind them that outings are meant to be one-on-one. If your LP brings this topic up repeatedly, please let BPLP staff know. / BPs may wish to bring their own family or friends on an outing occasionally. This is permissible with direct parent/guardian permission and if BP remains the primary supervisor of LP during the outing.
- *Sickness, accidents, emergencies, medications* - Call the parent/guardian right away. Contact authorities or medical attention as needed. Contact BPLP staff if there are any incidents. BP and parent/guardian should discuss LP's medical conditions and medications. BP should not provide medical treatment or dispense medication to LP with the one exception of life-threatening emergencies (e.g. LP has severe allergic reaction or asthma attack) and parent/guardian has given BP permission to administer treatment (e.g. Epi-Pen or inhaler). BPs should not give LPs over-the-counter medications without direct instruction from parent/guardian.
- *Social media* - BPLP strongly discourages BP connecting with LP and LP's family on social media in order to establish appropriate boundaries. Participants are encouraged to set all social media accounts to private and should be aware how the content on their accounts could affect the match relationship. If BP and LP wish to connect on social, written permission from LP's parent/guardian must be given before a request is made.
- *Spending time at a home* - Matches are required to wait 3 months before spending time at BP's home. After this waiting period, many matches spend time at BP's house because it's free and allows for activities like cooking, playing board games, watching TV and many other things. When BP and LP are at a home, they are to remain in the common areas of the home. BP is to always keep an eye on LP - never let LP be left alone or allow LP to go off with another person in the household if BP is not present. If BP lives in a dorm on campus, BP and LP are not to spend time together in the dorm, but are encouraged to do things on campus in the common areas. Spending time at LP's house is not recommended, but is permissible in some situations such as if LP is ill or grounded.
- *Supervising LP, getting separated* - LP should always be within "sight and sound" of BP during an activity. BP and LP should create a safety plan before an event in case they become separated. LP and BP should have one another's phone numbers saved and/or memorized.
- *Transportation* - In most cases, BPs will use personal vehicles to pick up LP, drive to activity and return LP home. BP must always be the driver when LP is in the vehicle. Always wear seat belts. LPs age 12 and under must ride in the backseat.

LPs age 8 and under must use a booster seat. BPs are not allowed to use their phone while in the vehicle. BPs are required to maintain auto insurance that meets or exceeds state minimum requirements.

Communication

With a Little Pal:

1. Listen and take time to understand
2. Share about yourself and your personal experiences
3. Be honest and talk through issues that come up
4. Use "I" statements to avoid assumptions or putting them down
5. Ask open-ended questions to encourage conversation
6. Expect some little white lies from them at first
7. Keep your promises
8. If you are going to be out of town for a while, let them know

With a parent/guardian:

1. Talk before and after activities, make sure they know your plans
2. Coordinate pick up/drop off
3. Respect privacy and confidentiality
4. Keep relationship focused on LP

With BPLP staff:

1. Call anytime you have concerns, need ideas or want to share good news
2. Return phone calls and emails from staff
3. Attend agency events when you can
4. Keep updated with current phone number, email and mailing address

Resources

Big Pals-Little Pals Facebook page + emails - Be sure to follow BPLP on Facebook and read the emails staff send out! BPLP often receives donated tickets like sporting events and theater productions. This is also how we spread the word on upcoming group activities and other big news in the agency.

Columbus Family YMCA - BPs and LPs can visit the YMCA for free when they go together! When you arrive, tell the front desk attendant you are a Big Pals-Little Pals match and give them your names. They have a list of our matches to verify. Check out their website (columbusy.org) for lists of available activities.

Columbus Hockey and Skate Center - BPs and LPs can go skating for free when they go together! Head out to the center and let the staff know that you are a Big Pals-LPs match to receive free skate rentals and skating. Check out columbuseventcenter.com to find open skating times.

Central Community College Athletics - BPs and LPs can attend CCC-Columbus athletic events for free when they go together! Be sure to pick up a pair of passes from the BPLP office and check out the Raiders athletics calendar on their website (cccraiders.com).