

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING COVID-19

The past year has forced our organization and our matches to adapt to a new virtual world. While this has been a challenge and learning curve over the past year, we have worked hard to support our matches with ideas and tips on how to build and maintain a developmental relationship in this new virtual world. This resource is a combination of all our COVID-19 virtual activity ideas, relationship building tips, and effective e-mentoring tips. If you have more ideas that you think would be helpful for your fellow Bigs, please email activities@bbbsci.org.



KEEPING YOUR LITTLE ENGAGED DURING COVID-19

CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR PHONE CONVERSATIONS

- **15-minute Phone Call Once a Week** – one Big has found that she will look up some simple jokes before their call and tell her Little jokes each week on their call. It's a simple and fun way to engage her Little and keep the conversation flowing, as well as getting her Little to open up.
- **iMessage Games During the Call** – one Big quickly realized his Little is not good at talking on the phone and it can be hard to keep the conversation flowing. He started challenging his Little to iMessage games (i.e. pool) during their calls and they stay on the phone while they play. This helps give them something to talk about and also an activity to do together while chatting.
- **Weekly Discussion Over TV Show or Movie** – one Big and her Little have decided that every Thursday at 5:00 pm they will have a phone call to discuss a TV show or movie they decided to watch for the week. They rotate who gets to pick what they're watching, and this gives them easy conversation starters for their weekly call.
- **Simple Conversation Starters** – Other simple ideas for conversation starters over the phone that were shared are:
 - Mad Libs (you can Google simple Mad Libs to complete over the phone)
 - 2 Truths and 1 Lie
 - [20 Questions](#)
 - [101 Riddles](#)
 - [Sporcle Quizzes](#)

MY LITTLE HAS MINIMAL TECHNOLOGY ACCESS – WHAT DO I DO?

- **Simply Make the Effort** – If you are finding yourself in this spot, you are NOT alone! The most important thing we learned from our Mentoring Relationship Specialists and fellow Bigs is that the most important thing is that your **Little knows you are trying – regardless if you are able to connect**. When your Little looks back on this time, the most important thing they remember is that you were there, and you tried – not how many jokes you told them over the phone. Here are some examples of how you can be present without connecting via technology:

- **Drop off a goodie bag at your Little's house** – one Big dropped off a baggie with coloring books, stickers, books, magazines, etc!
- **Drop off an activity your Little and their family can do together** – one example a Big provided was she dropped off a cookie decorating kit that her Little and whole family could do together.
- **Send your Little mail** – Some Bigs have been writing their Little letters and including the return mail and stamps to make it easy for them to reply. This way technology won't create an issue for you and it's a fun project for your Little to work on their letter back to you!
- **Drop in for a surprise (socially distanced) visit** – One Big surprised her Little on her birthday by baking her a cake and decorating her Little's front door. She dropped off the cake and was able to wish her Little a Happy Birthday, even if they couldn't have a birthday hug!

The key takeaway for your Little will be that you tried and created a presence, even if you weren't talking on the phone or video chatting. Any small activities and gifts go a long way these days, you just have to think outside the box!

GENERAL TIPS & TRICKS

- **Decide on a Day & Time to Talk to Your Little** – Communicating with your Little during this time is tough and consistency is even tougher. Many Bigs shared that they decided on a certain time & day of the week that they call / FaceTime / Zoom with their Little and this makes it easier to get ahold of them. Also, be sure to reach out to your Little's parent/guardian to decide on a good time & day as often times the Little needs to borrow their technology in order to communicate.
- **Figure Out Your Little's "language"** – If you are struggling to get your Little to open up, figure out their "language" or one topic they love. For example, if your Little loves baseball, research some online baseball games you can play together or buy them some books about baseball and drop them off at their house.
- **Any Communication is Key** – At this point, the main thing to remember is that any communication is key. There are not set standards or best practices - this is an unprecedented time, so be easy on yourself! Even if your communication is 1-sided and you feel like you and your Little aren't connecting, they will remember that you are making an effort and that is what is the most important thing.



PROMOTING EFFECTIVE E-MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

This section of information is gathered and compiled information from a research paper, E-Mentoring Supplement, that was written and published by Mentor, The National Mentoring Partnership. The purpose of this information is to provide our Bigs with tips and research on how to effectively maintain and carry out an e-mentoring relationship during this time of social distancing.

HOW TO FORM EFFECTIVE E-MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

- Effective e-mentoring relationships are formed through high-quality interactions and conversations between mentors and mentees.
- Communication between mentors and mentees should be frequent, primarily mentee focused, and two-way so that the mentor and mentee are both contributing to the relationship.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE YOUR E-MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

- For newer relationships, try to avoid text-based communication (SMS, email, chats) as there is a higher likelihood for misinterpretation or miscommunication such as a failure to identify a sarcastic comment from a serious comment.
- Mentors can foster a stronger social presence (the feeling of being in-person) using emoticons and other techniques.
- Mentors can encourage their mentee to say more by describing their emotional reactions to what they're saying. For example, using "LOL" or "Laughing out Loud".

FREQUENCY OF INTERACTION

- Frequency of interaction between mentoring partners is key when determining a successful e-mentoring relationship.
- Mentees may experience significant anxiety or stress if they do not receive a prompt response from their mentors. This can be a common issue that can arise in e-mentoring relationships.
- When there are high levels of interaction between mentoring partners, mentees are more likely to report that the relationship was beneficial and successful.
- Technical issues can be a major barrier to the development of effective relationships, and this should be addressed early on in the e-mentoring relationship to avoid infrequent communication between the mentoring partners.



VIRTUAL MATCH ACTIVITY RECCOMENDATIONS

This is a compiled list of virtual activities and communication tools that our matches can do/use to stay connected during this time of social distancing.

KEEP A DIARY DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING

Purchase a journal or diary for you and your Little. Determine a schedule for writing topics and having virtual meetings/discussions and reflection. Reflect on daily activities, feelings, emotions and how you have been spending your time during COVID-19.

36 QUESTIONS FOR INCREASING CONNECTIVITY

During video chats or phone calls, consider selecting questions from this list provided by Greater Good in Action from Berkeley. Before trying it, make sure both you and your Little are comfortable with sharing personal thoughts and feelings with each other. Each person should answer each question, but in an alternating order, so that a different person goes first each time.

Link:

https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/36_questions_for_increasing_closeness?_ga=2.119480203.365091663.1585083206-631830334.1585083206

ACTIVE LISTENING DURING VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

Communicating virtually with your Little can be a struggle. One tip to help with virtual connections is for Bigs to practice being active listeners. Click the link below for more details, info, and guidance!

Link: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/active_listening?_ga=2.119480203.365091663.1585083206-631830334.1585083206

FREE E-BOOKS FOR YOU AND YOUR LITTLE!

Oxford Owl has provided free e-books for children ages 3-11. You can use this resource to read books to your Little OR start your own virtual book club with your Little. You can schedule weekly calls to discuss your books or to read together.

Link: <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/>

LEARN TO DRAW – VIRTUAL SESSIONS WITH ARTISTS

Develop a talent, skill, or passion together! There are a ton of experts creating exceptional online content right now that can help you and your Little. Follow the link below to learn more!

Author and illustrator on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/studioijk>

Lunch doodles with Mo Willems:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL14hRqd0PELGbKihHuTqx_pbvCLqGbOkF

MESSENGER KIDS FROM FACEBOOK

A great way to safely connect with your Little via a social media platform, while keeping their parent looped in, is through Messenger Kids from Facebook. Follow the link below for more info on how it works!

Link: <https://messengerkids.com/how-it-works/>

SCREENSHOTS OF YOU + YOUR LITTLE!

How are you and your Little staying connected during this time of social distancing? We would love to hear about it and see it! Send in any screenshots you have of you and your Little connecting via Facetime, Skype, Zoom, etc! Send pictures to activities@bbbsci.org.

VIRTUAL GAME NIGHT – DRAW SOMETHING

You and your Little can both download the app, Draw Something and have a virtual game night together!

Download “Draw Something” from any app store or mobile platform.

Link for Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/draw-something-classic/id488628250>

VIRTUAL GAME NIGHT – WORDS WITH FRIENDS

You and your Little can both download the app, Words with Friends and have a virtual game night together!

Download “Words with Friends” from any app store or mobile platform.

Link for Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/words-with-friends-word-game/id804379658>

WRITE A GRATITUDE LIST

Bigs and Littles can each write a gratitude list of what they are thankful for in their everyday lives. You can write your list and then call each other and discuss what you both wrote. This is a good way to stay connected and keep your mind distracted during this time of social distancing.



BUILDING DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

This information was provided through The Search Institute's research that demonstrates when young people experience developmental relationships with parents, educators, youth program staff, and other adults their outcomes are better, their risk behaviors are lower, and they are more likely to be on the path to thrive in life. Knowing this, continuing to build these developmental relationships throughout the COVID-19 crisis is more important than ever. The following tips are ways to help you know that you are making a valuable contribution to helping young people weather this storm.

EXPRESS CARE: SHOW ME THAT I MATTER TO YOU

- Send a text, email, video, or note that says they matter to you personally and you are thinking about them during this crisis.
- Ask them how they are spending their time at home during this crisis.
- Tell them that you believe in them and you know they will get through this difficult time, then move on with learning and growing.

CHALLENGE GROWTH: PUSH ME TO KEEP GETTING BETTER

- Let young people know that you expect them to keep up with the work of your school or program even though times are difficult; hold them accountable if they don't put in the effort.
- Encourage or require young people to use the time at home to focus on learning or doing something that they have been struggling with in your class or program.
- Ask young people what they are or could be doing to help their parents, siblings, or others get through this difficult time.
- Ask young people to set one personal goal for something they want to achieve during the time away from your school or program, and then periodically check in on their progress.

PROVIDE SUPPORT: HELP ME COMPLETE TASKS AND ACHIEVE GOALS

- Ask young people how they are feeling about the world, themselves, and the future during the crisis. Indicate that you really hear them when they respond and that you care about their feelings.
- Send notes to parenting adults to suggest ways they can help young people stay connected to the work of your class or program while they are at home.

SHARE POWER: TREAT ME WITH RESPECT AND GIVE ME A SAY

- Ask young people what rules and norms your class or group should follow as you work together remotely. Give them voice and choice in shaping your new ways of working and being together
- Let young people design and/or lead some of the virtual activities and lessons you assign to the class or group.
- Invite young people to tell you how they think you can support them during their time away from your school or program.
- After you have been working together via technology for a while, ask young people for their feedback on how it is going and make adjustments to incorporate their feedback into your

subsequent work with them.

- When you can, offer choices rather than mandating a single option.

EXPAND POSSIBILITIES: CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT BROADEN MY WORLD

- Send young people something to watch or read that will be new to them and that you normally wouldn't have time to focus on in your regular class or group.
- Tell young people about a crisis or difficult experience you went through when you were young and share how that crisis or experience shaped who you are today.
- Ask young people to use the Web and social media to explore how young people very different from them around the country or around the world are experiencing the response to COVID-19.
- Create opportunities for young people to evaluate how authorities at the local, state, and national level are responding to the crisis and to consider what they would do differently if they were in power.
- Hold a virtual chat using video or text with someone who works in the job or field that is the focus of your class or group, but who you would not have been able to connect your students to in person due to distance or other factors.

