

## ***\*Role of the Big Buddy\****

### **What You Are...**

#### A Friend

Each Buddy brings their life experiences, values and expectations to the relationship. Like peer friendships, mentors and Little Buddies do things together that are fun and engaging. They support each other both in good times and in tough times. They teach each other. They help each other. They are honest with each other. And sometimes they have to have hard conversations about concerns they have, asking the right questions at the right time. It takes time for two people to get to know each other and develop a sense of trust. For some pairs it takes more time than others. The Big Buddy must invest time, be willing to share and give of themselves, and treat the Little Buddy with respect. Listening is crucial in establishing trust; it validates thoughts and feelings and communicates that the Big Buddy values the Little Buddy as a person. By being a good listener and engaging in authentic conversations with your Little Buddy, you are helping him/her develop important life skills. Ideally this type of friendship is based upon unconditional positive regard.

#### A Positive Role Model

Role modeling offers the Little Buddy a way to learn appropriate behavior. Modeling is an important part of learning and children learn by example. Many Little Buddies have learned inappropriate or unhealthy patterns of behavior. The Big Buddies can effectively model healthy behavior, appropriate social relationships, healthy coping skills, and how to make healthy decisions regarding drug and alcohol use. The Big Buddy will also model attitudes towards work, family, interpersonal relationships, school and other institutions. Your habits, attitudes, and conduct in the presence of the child may strongly influence the child's ideas about alcohol, drugs, tobacco, cursing, and dealing with people and their differences. This does not mean you have to be perfect. Rather it is about acknowledging your imperfections and sharing your strengths. Be appropriate, mature, genuine, respectful and responsible at all times with your Buddy.

#### A Confidant

Building a close relationship with your Little Buddy will help her build better relationships with others in her life as well, such as parents and peers. In the

process, your Little Buddy may tell you things she does not feel comfortable telling anyone else. Sometimes she may tell you about her hopes, dreams, or insecurities. Other times she may reveal mistakes she has made. Unless your Little Buddy is in trouble and needs outside help, try to keep her private comments between the two of you. Your role is to be supportive of your Little Buddy as a person with potential, regardless of the kinds of actions or attitudes she confides in you.

### Respectful of Parents

Your primary responsibility is to your Little Buddy. However, parents can play a paramount role in establishing and continuing the relationship between Buddies. Most parents are supportive and helpful, but others may seem a little uninvolved. Many of these parents are struggling with their issues or unmet needs. The Little Buddy will understandably have feelings of loyalty to the parent, regardless of the nature of the family situation. The Big Buddy must respect this relationship. Dealing with difficult families requires patience and diplomacy. Support is available through your Case Manager if you need help negotiating or working with family members. Lastly, the Big Buddy needs to be careful not be used as a tool for a parent to obtain custody of the child or to cause problems in divorce issues. Remember confidentiality and good judgment when dealing with these issues.

### A Nurturer of Possibilities

Your role is to see the gifts and strengths of your Little Buddy and help him flourish personally. You should help your Little Buddy channel his gifts toward actions that make him a resource to others in his family, neighborhood, school, or community.

## **What You Are Not**

### A Substitute or Foster Parent

Your Little Buddy's home situation may be very different than you might have experienced. The parent(s) may not possess healthy or successful parenting skills, but try and not pass judgment or condemn the parent or situation. However, respond positively and listen empathetically. Your role is to provide special attention to your Little Buddy. While getting acquainted with parents, caregivers, and siblings can be helpful to understanding your mentee and her

situation, your energy and attention should be focused on providing support to your Little Buddy.

#### A Babysitter

You and your Little Buddy should spend mutually agreed-upon time together. If you are put into a position by the parent(s) where they are asking you to take their child at times only convenient to them, this can be a bit uncomfortable. Please contact your Case Manager when this happens. We will work with the family to explain what your role is and is not.

#### A Counselor, Social Worker or Doctor

If your Little Buddy tells you about experiences or health conditions that concern you, turn to the Buddy Program staff for help. It is not your responsibility to try and address conditions or situations that require professional help. In order to have a strong and healthy Buddy relationship, both parties need to feel safe and secure and not feel that one person is trying to continually fix all of their problems. The Buddy Program staff is trained and capable to seek out resources in the community to help your Little Buddy and their family.

#### A Significant Other for the Parent

Dating a parent of your Little Buddy is not recommended. This may result in the Big Buddy providing less attention to the Little Buddy and the relationship will inevitably suffer. Furthermore, a parent may negatively impact the child's relationship with the Big Buddy if the adult relationship sours.

#### A Financier/Chauffeur/Disciplinarian

These are not the roles of the Big Buddy. All Little Buddies are asked to bring \$5-\$10 for each outing. Please encourage your Little Buddy to use this money to participate in the activity with you. If we know ahead of time that the family can not afford this, we will work with you to find activities that don't cost money. All Buddy Program events are free and don't forget to use the discounts offered to Big and Little Buddies only!

Use absolute discretion when your Little Buddy asks you for a ride- how is this helping your relationship? You are not matched with a Little Buddy to provide

transportation for him/her or their family. In certain instances, carpooling to events with the child and family is ok, but you should not be relied upon to be the driver for your Little Buddy. Please contact your Case Manager if you are put in this position.

It is ok to have reasonable expectations about how your Little Buddy acts when you are out together. If the child's behavior makes you uncomfortable, it is also ok to have a discussion with your Little Buddy about their behavior when you are out together. If the behavior does not improve, please contact your Case Manager immediately.

#### A Savior

You should not see your role in this relationship as coming in to make a young person's life better or to fix his problems. Certainly your support can help your Little Buddy overcome hurdles. But don't forget that every young person- regardless of his circumstances- has gifts and talents that make him more than a "recipient" of your support. Your Little Buddy should be treated as having much to offer the world, because he does.