



 **Big Brothers Big Sisters.**
OF ORANGE COUNTY & THE INLAND EMPIRE

PARENT NEWSLETTER

MAY 2024

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BBBS TEAM

The words of the U.S. Surgeon General ring louder than ever: mental health challenges among our children and young adults are significant and widespread. Even before the onset of the pandemic, a troubling number of youth faced feelings of despair, hopelessness, and thoughts of suicide. Unfortunately, these challenges have only increased in the past ten years, worsened by the COVID-19 crisis. Consider these alarming statistics:

- In the U.S., 1 out of every 5 children (ages 3 to 17) deals with a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral issue.
- 42% of youth report persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness.
- The average gap between the onset of mental health challenges and accessing proper support is ten years.

Despite these significant challenges, Big Brothers Big Sisters serves as a beacon of hope and support amongst the youth we serve. We're committed to dealing with this crisis head-on, and our evidence-based mentoring model highlights the transformative influence of a caring mentor in enhancing mental health outcomes for youth in our programs. The outcomes speak for themselves:

- 92% of mentees in our program feel a sense of belonging, which is vital for their mental well-being.
- 82% of mentees have either maintained or seen enhancements in their mental health since joining BBBS.
- 90% of mentees say they feel better about themselves because of their relationship with their mentor.

As we look to the future, our dedication to addressing the mental health needs of our youth remains steadfast. We will continue to provide comprehensive training and support to our Bigs, families, youth, and staff. By raising awareness of youth's mental health and wellness, reducing stigma, and bridging the gap to care, we strive to foster an environment where no child faces mental health challenges alone, and every young person has the resources and support to thrive.

Thank you for entrusting us with the privilege of supporting your child's journey toward better mental health and overall well-being. Together, we can build a future where every young person feels valued, empowered, and equipped to face life's challenges head-on.

In partnership,



Jessica González

Family Engagement Manager
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BBBS PARENT TESTIMONIAL



"When my neighbor referred me to Big Brothers Big Sisters, I didn't know it would change our lives this way. My son has found a hero in his Big Brother, Josh. Josh has taught [my son] everything from the importance of being noble to being open to new things like basketball. My son is now a happier child since he started in the program and the support that the entire family has received has been a blessing. In times of need I have turned to my Match Support Specialist, Michelle, who has been able to connect us to resources in the community. Thanks to the support of this program, we are what we are today."

UPCOMING BBBS EVENTS



Family Mental Health Training Series

Training #1: Saturday, June 8, 2024 | 10 AM - 12:30 PM

Training #2: Thursday, July 25, 2024 | 6 PM - 7:30 PM

[CLICK HERE TO RSVP FOR YOUR FAMILY](#)

This two-part series aims to empower BBBS families who are facing youth mental health challenges. Join us at the Big Brothers Big Sisters Office where we will break into two groups, one for parents and one for youth ages 10 to 18. Each training will foster community support and equip you with the knowledge and essential strategies to oversee your family's well-being. **Connect, learn, and thrive!**

Parent Session Topics:

- Addressing mental health stigma and misconceptions
- Coping strategies for parents during youth mental health challenges
- How to cultivate empathy and understanding within the family
- Managing stress and anxiety as caregivers

Youth Session Topics (Ages 10-18):

- Addressing mental health and substance use stigma and misconceptions
- How to support peers dealing with mental health challenges or substance use disorder
- Tools and tips for being a compassionate and effective support system



FOR BBBS FAMILIES ONLY



Back-to-School Bash

Backpack Distribution & Health Fair

Don't miss out on our annual back-to-school backpack distribution event! Thanks to the support of Families Together of Orange County, we will also be offering medical and dental clinics to ensure your students are healthy and ready for the new school year.

Be on the lookout for a text from BBBS with more event details and registration link in early July!

MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

In today's world, addressing mental health challenges requires breaking down stigmas and fostering open conversations. Join us on this journey to become champions in supporting our youth's mental well-being!

Here are **five keys** to empower parents and guardians to recognize and address mental health changes in their children. Through active listening, gestures of care, and modeling healthy practices, you can create a supportive home environment where our children and teens feel valued and understood.

KEY 1: LISTEN & BUILD TRUST



Start by actively listening to your child. Show genuine interest in their thoughts and feelings, and avoid jumping to advice or solutions right away. Instead, focus on understanding their perspective and validating their emotions.

TIP! Consider putting away your phone, maintaining appropriate eye contact, avoiding interruptions, and keeping open body language. Give it a shot and see how it enhances your conversations!

KEY 2: PRACTICE EVERYDAY GESTURES



Simple, daily gestures demonstrate care and support. Ask about their day at school, celebrate their small wins, and honor their identity. These small acts help open up the line of communication and create a sense of safety, trust, and self-worth in young people.

TIP! Inspire your child to see their own strength by celebrating the small wins—and failures. Let them know you are proud of them, even if they don't succeed.

KEY 3: MODEL HEALTHY PRACTICES



Normalize discussions about mental health by openly sharing your own feelings and regularly checking in with your child's. By encouraging dialogue and modeling openness about mental health, you send a powerful message to your youth: it's okay to not feel okay, it's okay to talk about it, and I am here for you.

TIP! Before starting a conversation about mental health, reflect on and challenge any stigmatizing beliefs you may hold on the topic. Address harmful language and behavior before talking about a triggering subject.

MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

KEY 4: RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS



Be aware of potential signs of mental health challenges in youth, including changes in mood, behavior, thinking patterns, or life events. Prioritize regular check-ins with youth to help you differentiate between normal fluctuations and persistent concerns. Be vigilant for signs indicating a need for immediate intervention, such as thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Remember, you're not expected to have all the answers, and you're not alone. If you recognize any of these signs, don't hesitate to ask for help from a counselor or teacher, family member or other caring adult, or your Big Brothers Big Sisters team.

TIP! Here are some of the most common changes and warning signs to be on the lookout for:



Mood

Feeling sad or hopeless, or experiencing extreme emotions like rage or uncontrollable worry.



Behavior

Isolating from others, losing interest in usual activities, or engaging in arguments or fights.



Thinking

Experiencing racing or repetitive thoughts, being hyper-focused on something, or being unable to concentrate.



Life Events

Experiencing a major event such as moving, starting a new school, loss of a loved one, or being placed in foster care.

KEY 5: HOW TO RESPOND



When you notice concerning signs, initiate conversations using the S.A.V.E approach:

- S**ummarize what you've observed
- A**cknowledge their feelings
- V**alidate their experiences, and
- E**ngage them in finding support

If suicide warning signs are present, act immediately by addressing the issue directly and seeking professional help. Ensure the young person feels supported and understood, even if they're not ready to open up fully. Involve other trusted adults and communicate with relevant support services to provide comprehensive care.

If there is an immediate concern for your child's safety, don't hesitate to reach out for help.

- *Children and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Assessment Team: Call (866) 830-6011*
- *The Crisis Text Line: Text BIG to 741741*
- *The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Dial 988*

FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAM PARENTS

"A community is a group of people who agree to grow together."

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Mentoring relationships are a safe space where your child is able to share, enjoy new experiences, and grow without fear of judgment. These relationships help increase your child's confidence in themselves and have proven to be an effective solution to the mental health issues our youth are facing today.

As your Match Support team, we understand the importance of building strong connections, and we are grateful to have an amazing community of parents and guardians who believe in the value of mentorship. The role that you play in your child's match is vital to a healthy and effective mentoring relationship.

Here are some things you can do to help improve the **consistency** and **communication** within your child's match—two keys to seeing positive outcomes for your child:

- Encourage your child to stay connected with their mentor between outings.
- Avoid canceling outings with your child's mentor; they should be viewed as a priority.
- If a cancellation is unavoidable, make sure you find time to reschedule the outing.

Thank you for entrusting us with your child's well-being and personal growth. It's our honor to walk alongside your family on your mentorship journey.



Katie Esparza

Match Engagement & Enrichment Manager

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PROGRAM REMINDERS



Your monthly/quarterly calls with your assigned BBBS Match Support Specialist (MSS) are critical to the health of your child's match. During these support calls, MSS are able to share feedback from the Big, share youth development wins, and most importantly, learn how we can better support you and your child. Help us help you, and be sure to answer all calls and texts from your MSS!

Having trouble getting a hold of your MSS? Contact Katie Esparza at (714) 619-7037 to get connected.



Any and all outings that occur at your or your child's mentor's home need prior approval from your MSS before they may occur. While Bigs are responsible for requesting approval with your MSS, parents play an important role in communication. Make sure you ask about outing details from your child and/or their Big.

FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

High School Bigs is a peer-to-peer mentoring program that connects your child (Little) with a high school student (Big) who serves as their friend and role model. Matches meet once a week after school at the elementary school. During this session, facilitated by a Big Brothers Big Sisters Program Specialist, matches spend time working on academics, building social and personal skills, and developing a friendship.

PERSONAL SAFETY RULES

At BBBS, safety is our number one priority. Over summer break, please be aware that Bigs and Littles are NOT permitted to have contact or visits.

For the safety and well-being of all participants, Littles are strictly prohibited from exchanging personal contact information with their Big, such as phone numbers or social media profiles.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Throughout the year, your child and their Big worked on a Youth Outcome Development Plan (YODP) to help achieve their goals.

Our proven curriculum included activities that focused on:

- Increasing confidence
- Building social skills
- Learning self-regulation
- Future planning and exploration
- Creating stronger relationships

ACTIVITIES

We're concluding the school year with some fantastic activities:

- **Big Bucks Store:** Littles exchange the "Big Bucks" they earned from program participation and attendance all year long for small toys and treats donated and fundraised for by their Bigs!
- **Summer Letters:** Bigs and Littles write an encouraging letter to each other that will be mailed out by their Program Specialist during summer break.
- **End-of-the-year Pizza Party!** Matches will commemorate a year of friendship and memories over pizza and refreshments.

Program sites may be wrapping up in May, but before we say goodbye, there's still plenty to be excited for coming up in June and July!



Summer Celebration

10 AM - 2 PM • Santa Ana Zoo

FREE ZOO ENTRY • PHOTO BOOTH • GAME TRUCK • & MORE! | LUNCH & TRANSPORTATION PROVIDED

Our annual Summer Celebration brings together Bigs and Littles for a day of fun at the Santa Ana Zoo. This event is a great opportunity for your student to create lasting memories and strengthen the bonds they formed throughout the year.

[CLICK HERE TO RSVP](#)

Please check your mailbox this summer for your student's **Summer Letter!** This tradition to exchange heartfelt, hand-written messages between Bigs and Littles via snail mail helps your child feel connected to their Big and serves as a reminder of the impact of mentorship, even when we're apart. *If you have recently changed your mailing address, please notify your Program Specialist ASAP so your child receives their letter from their Big.*



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

As the school year comes to an end, so does another year of High School Bigs. So, **what's next for your child?**

FOR RETURNING LITTLES

If your child will be returning to the same elementary school in the fall, weekly High School Bigs site sessions will restart in Fall 2024. You do not need to submit a new application to participate in our program again next school year. If you plan to change schools next year, please contact your Program Specialist.

Your Program Specialist will be in touch in September-October to update you on your site start date and 2024-2025 schedule. Please note that Big Brothers Big Sisters is open all year round; please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or require community support or resources—we are here to help!

FOR PROMOTING LITTLES

If your child is promoting to middle school this fall, their High School Bigs match will be official closed in June, meaning your child will no longer be active in our program. Your Program Specialist will send you a closure letter for final communication from our agency.



IS YOUR KID HEADED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL? Their mentorship journey doesn't have to end here!

Enroll your child in one of these Big Brothers Big Sisters programs and **help them realize their potential**. By giving them the opportunity to continue to be mentored, you can keep your Little on the path to a bright, promising future.

SPORTS BUDDIES

Connecting young people with a mentor through sports.

- >> **Mentor (Big):** Adult volunteer (18+)
- >> **Mentee (Little):** Youth (ages 11-14)
- >> **Structure:** Matches participate in 1 or 2 group activities per month facilitated by BBBS

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)

COMMUNITY-BASED

Big Brothers Big Sisters' traditional mentorship program!

- >> **Mentor (Big):** Adult volunteer (18+)
- >> **Mentee (Little):** Youth (ages 6-16)
- >> **Structure:** Matches schedule their own one-on-one outings in the community 2 times per month

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)

FOR WORKPLACE MENTORING PARENTS

During monthly group sessions facilitated by Big Brothers Big Sisters, Workplace Mentoring focuses on fostering college and career readiness and leadership development in high school and college students through mentorship. Our corporate mentors from some of Orange County's top businesses provide students with guidance and support to set them on a path towards success and empowerment.

It has been a productive year for our Workplace Mentoring matches, and we are excited to share a glimpse of what our students have accomplished in the past few months in this edition of the Parent Newsletter! You should be proud of all your student has achieved and the initiative they have shown to create a bright future for themselves and their families.

With many sites wrapping up in May, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated corporate mentors, supportive families, and enthusiastic mentees whose collective efforts have enriched each other's journeys of learning and growth this last school year or semester.

Here's to the power of mentorship and the promise of youth!



Melanie Edwards

College & Career Program Manager
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WORKPLACE MENTORING: FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- In January, we proudly launched a new cohort at Katella High School connecting students with corporate mentors from **Visit Anaheim**.
- Tustin High School x **Banc of California** thrived in their second year of mentorship, fostering meaningful connections and professional growth.
- In May, our Katella High School x **Disneyland Resort** cohort celebrated their final site session, culminating their rewarding three-year journey together.

Throughout the Spring, each site has explored essential topics to empower all students with invaluable skills for their future careers, such as:

- Resume building
- Embracing a growth mindset
- Identifying personal strengths and interests
- Career exploration

WORKPLACE MENTORING: FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

This Spring we launched two new sites, marking remarkable growth and program impact to start 2024.

- We kicked with **Google Irvine** x Cypress College, setting the stage for immersive educational experiences and professional development.
- Next was our first-ever collaborative effort to unite mentors from various OC companies in the financial sector with students from Orange Coast College, which led to enriching mentorship relationships and career exploration.

Students have honed crucial corporate skills and gained valuable insights into launching a successful career from their mentors, covering topics such as:

- Interviewing techniques and resume building
- Networking tips and strategies
- Crafting effective elevator pitches

COMMUNITY RESOURCES



64th Annual Strawberry Festival Parade

The annual Garden Grove Strawberry Festival is one of the premier festivals in Southern California. The parade features floats, bands, equestrians, and cartoon characters. Admission is free and a great start to Memorial Day weekend!

Date & Time: Saturday, May 25

Location: Euclid Street & Main Street, Garden Grove

OC Parks Summer Concert and Sunset Cinema Film Series

Kickoff your summer weekends with free live music and movie screenings under the stars with OC Parks! Every Friday from June 7 to August 30, you can enjoy family-friendly entertainment at regional parks. All events are free to attend with free parking, just bring your chairs, blankets, friends and family!



Check out the concert and screening series line up and learn more at ocparks.com.



City of Santa Ana Fourth of July Celebration

This free community event will include live music, kid's activities, patriotic-themed raffles, food trucks and BBQ, and an amazing 20-minute firework show!

Date & Time: Thursday, July 4 | 5 PM - 9:30 PM

Location: Centennial Park | 3000 W Edinger Ave, Santa Ana, CA 92705

For the latest updates, visit santa-ana.org/fourth-of-july.

SHOP THE CLEMENTINE MOBILE FOOD TROLLEY AT BBBS

Get your fresh fruits and vegetables at Clementine, the mobile food trolley! Set up in the Big Brothers Big Sisters parking lot, free groceries and supplies for eligible OC families* as available. Advanced sign up is required.

July 10

SIGN UP AT OCBIGS.ORG/FOOD-TROLLEY

Registration form opens July 3

* Must be Orange County resident with school-aged child(ren) in the home

BrightLife Kids
COACHING FOR KIDS

Get support with the tough stuff and help your child thrive
 No costs attached. No insurance required. No referrals needed.

Created by Brightline (an industry leader in pediatric mental health) and 100% paid for by the State of California, BrightLife Kids is a Cash4Care® program that offers behavioral health coaching to all kids ages 0-12 who live in California.

BrightLife Kids helps

- Kids learn how to manage big emotions, friendships, self-confidence, and more.
- Parents/caregivers build confidence and structure.
- Families dealing with challenging milestones, behaviors, and transitions.

- Coaching is done in private, 1:1 video sessions and via secure chat. Families are matched with a dedicated coach, so there's no starting over each time. And families also have access to on-demand digital resources like articles and videos that can help between sessions.

BrightLife Kids coaches

- Many are bilingual in **English and Spanish** and have **training and experience** working with LGBTQ+ and BIPOC populations
- Come from **diverse backgrounds** (just like the families they work with)
- Specialize in **personalized coaching** for kids and families

Scan the QR code or visit brightlife.kids/oa to create your no-cost account today. For more information, email ca@hellobrightline.com.

*The Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) is a 94.78 percentage of investments funded by Governor Gavin Newsom to support California's kids. One of the goals of CYBHI is to give kids and families the opportunity to receive expert behavioral health support in an easy-to-access, digital format. BrightLife was chosen out of hundreds of vendors to be the partner for children ages 0-12.

Click to enlarge



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