



A Top Priority-Child Safety

Children's safety is our #1 priority. We focus on the child's safety and well-being throughout the match. We do this by providing:

- Thorough professional screening.
- Child Safety and child abuse prevention education programs for volunteers, parents and children.
- Guidelines that establish appropriate boundaries and respect a child's right to feel safe.
- Ongoing BBBS Match Support contact with each party in the match. This helps provide up-to-date information about safety issues and early warnings of potential problems throughout the match relationship.
- The BBBS Match Support Specialist maintains *required* consistent scheduled contacts with each member of the match party.

As a Big you play a role in keeping the child safe. Bigs need to model appropriate behavior.

Some safety issues include: Internet safety, bullying and violence prevention, the Little's medical condition and child abuse prevention.

Our agency has expectations and guidelines relating to Child Safety. We expect you to know and follow these guidelines.

If you ever have a situation where your Little talks to you about any abuse or violence he/she is subject to, contact your Match Support Specialist immediately. Our response to the disclosure by a child can prevent negative outcomes for the child and their family. For that reason, it's critical that volunteers follow our BBBS protocols on reporting abuse.

Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse

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Occasionally we work with children who have been abused and/or neglected. The perpetrator(s) can be a family member(s), friend(s), or stranger(s). If the agency is aware of a history of abuse or neglect with your specific Little, the pertinent information will be shared with you.

Definitions of Generally Recognized Forms of Child Maltreatment:

- 1. Physical abuse is characterized by non-accidental injury inflicted by hitting, cutting, burning, biting, or otherwise harming a child.**
- 2. Sexual abuse is characterized by a wide range of activities an adult initiates with a child, including obscene phone calls, e-mails, or other correspondence; fondling a child's genitalia; incest; sodomy; and rape.**
- 3. Emotional abuse is characterized by inappropriate adult interactions with a child, such as rejection, ignorance, terrorization, isolation, and corruption.**
- 4. Neglect is characterized by failure to provide the basic necessities of life to a child. However, neglect is not based upon factors related to poverty.**

Overview of Child Sexual Abuse

- 1. Child sexual abuse is the exploitation, which involves a range of sexual activities from touching to non-touching offenses, of a minor by an adult and/or older child/teen for the sexual gratification of the abusive individual.**
- 2. Incest involves members of the same family, excluding husband and wife, engaging in a range of sexual activities. Generally, incest involves an adult and/or older perpetrator and a minor child over an extended period of time.**
- 3. Child sexual assault is unrelated individuals engaging in a range of sexual activities involving a minor/child victim and an adult(s) and/or older child(ren) who are the abusers. Generally, child sexual assault occurs over an extended period of time.**

Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect

Signs of neglect may be:

1. Child's Appearance:

- Constantly hungry, underweight, or small for age
- Often unclean
- Dresses inappropriately for the weather
- Alone and unsupervised for long periods of time or abandoned
- Needs medical, dental, or optical care

2. Child's Behavior:

- Begs or steals food
- Listless, tired, or falling asleep
- Assumes adult roles and responsibilities
- Poor school attendance or comes early and stays late
- Engages in vandalism or sexual misconduct

Signs of physical abuse may be:

1. Child's Appearance:

- Unusual bruises, welts, burns, lacerations or abrasions, or bite marks
- Dislocations, fractures, or internal injuries
- Loose or missing teeth, head injuries
- Frequent injuries that are explained as "accidental"

2. Child's Behavior:

- Exhibits extremes in behavior (e.g., very aggressive or excessively self-controlled)
- Avoids physical contact with others or is overly compliant
- Wears inappropriate clothing to hide injuries
- Reports injury by parents or gives unbelievable explanations for injuries
- Poor self-concept
- May hurt other children

Signs of sexual abuse may be:

- 1. Child's Appearance: Physical clues are usually not obvious, so behavior is the best indicator.**

- 2. Child's Behavior:**
 - **May bite, suck, rock, or scratch self excessively**
 - **Complains of being "sick" often**
 - **Fearful of new situations**
 - **Passive and withdrawn or hyperactive**
 - **Acts older or younger than age**
 - **Aggressive and antisocial or overly submissive and dependent**
 - **Attempts suicide**

Appropriate Responses to Child's Disclosure of Sexual Abuse

The effects of sexual abuse can be long-lasting and devastating.

Disclosure:

Sometimes children tell about sexual abuse(s) directly. More often they are hesitant to talk about it. Most children offer only indirect messages about their situation.

Children who use such indirect messages may be asking for help to talk about their abuses. Ask directly, "Are there any secrets that you are keeping that are confusing or frightening to you?" or "Has anyone touched you or made you touch them in ways that you didn't like?" To answer such questions, children must feel believed and supported.

Children rarely lie about sexual abuse. When they do, it is usually to protect the persons who abused them or adults who would be upset upon learning about the abuse. Some children will only tell parts of the abuse to find out how their parents will react. How they react to these feelings can make a positive difference in their children's handling of the abuses.

Response:

One of the most important factors in children's abilities to recover from sexual abuse is the reactions of the first persons they tell. They need calm support at that time and continued assurances to stop any self-blame.

If a child tells you about sexual abuse, he/she should immediately be told that you:

- **believe what he/she said;**
- **are glad that he/she told you;**
- **know it was not his/her fault;**
- **are sorry it happened; and**
- **Will do your best to protect and support him/her.**

Do prepare to repeat these important messages often, but do not make any promises that you may not be able to keep. Encourage children to talk about abuses without pressuring them. Make it very clear that it is/was the abusers who are/were at fault. A calm reaction to their stories lets children know that they are not bad for having been molested or for telling you.

Reporting Suspected Abuses of Any Kind

A. Why?

- It is so important to report any suspected or real abuse. Abuse must be reported so that the child will not be a victim a second time.

B. When?

- Anytime abuse is suspected it must be reported immediately, because the child's welfare is at stake.
- If a parent or child discloses to you that abuse is occurring, it must be reported immediately.
- Evidence may be lost if you wait even a few days to report any incidence of abuse.

C. Where and to whom?

- You should report abuse to your Match Support Coordinator at Big Brothers Big Sisters.
- Once a Big Brothers Big Sisters' Match Support Coordinator receives information regarding abuse, a referral is made to Franklin, Union or Delaware County Children's Services. That is a legal obligation. All referrals are anonymous.
- If it is an emergency situation and your Match Support Coordinator is unavailable, please ask for the executive program director or vice president of programs.
- If no one from Big Brothers Big Sisters is available, please report the incident to your local county protective service agency at the appropriate number listed below. This call can be made anonymously. Then, be sure to make a follow-up call to your Big Brothers Big Sisters Match Support Coordinator.

Tuscarawas County: 330-339-7791

Carroll County: 330-627-7313

Holmes County: 330-674-1111

Agency's Procedure Concerning Abuse of a Client by a Mentor

Big Brothers Big Sisters would be very concerned to learn of a mentor suspected of abusing a child from its program. If this situation should ever arise, the agency would suspend the match. If the abuse allegations were either substantiated or not satisfactorily resolved, the agency would close the match. Legal action against the mentor will be taken if deemed appropriate.