

This document intends to guide agencies and Bigs supporting a Little coming out within their match/program. These tips and suggestions were put together through a conversation recently hosted between BBBS affiliates as part of the BBBS Metro Chicago and BBBS of Central Indiana LGBTQ+ Learning Hub. All experiences, discussions, and scenarios can have unique circumstances, so please always consider that when using this advice provided through the Hub.

Advice for Bigs and Tips for Affiliates Supporting Bigs

- Have direct conversations about policies, procedures, scenarios, etc. within your agency first; all of the work you do internally will help guide how you approach your work externally. I.E., discussing a coming out policy will lead to conversations about how to respond if that were to occur in your program
- Understanding not being out isn't inherently a bad/negative thing – the reality is many people are not out for genuine reasons. Sharing that with others is a very personal experience.
- Utilize a Coming Out Guide (Broward County example).
- Provide opportunities for Bigs to discuss scenarios together, such as a Bigs Discussion Group or training with local organizations explicitly tailored to your agency needs.
- Work with local organizations to collect local resources for staff, Big, Parent, youth.
- Letting youth lead, helping them with resources and whatever they need.
- Practice Active Listening.
- You don't have to "know it all" – you don't need to understand everything to be accepting.
 - The process doesn't have to be complicated – all you need to do is be there and listen. You don't need to have answers or immediate feedback.
 - Help the Big to be supportive no matter what, even if they don't understand or have never been through it before personally. Everyone should use affirming and supporting words that the Little understands.
- If you don't understand what something means, don't be afraid to ask the youth for clarification. Focus on what a term or topic means to the youth personally – you could always Google for general explanations and definitions, but words and labels can mean different things to people. **Always preface your question with the fact you only want the youth to share if they feel comfortable doing so.**
- If the Little comes out to the Big and the mentor shares this information with you, affirm the trust built for Little to show their mentor their vulnerability and bravery. This statement also holds for when the Little comes out to agency staff.
- If Little decides they want to come out to their parent/family, ask who they would like present when that occurs. The Little might wish to have the Big to be present, as well as agency staff. However, if they only want the Big present, that is okay. Let the Little lead the process.
- Big will be instrumental in keeping Little safe and supported, especially if they feel their Little doesn't want to come out to their parent and/or believe their home might not be a safe place.

Safety and Privacy of the Little

- Littles have seen Bigs and/or agency staff as some of the first safest adults to come out to – we should not out the youth to the parents.
- Agency can establish a Confidentiality of Youth who are Coming Out and/or Transitioning Policy (Central Indiana example).
- The most important thing is honoring the Little and making sure they are safe.
 - Situations where they probably would not be safe include but are not limited to self-harm and suicidal thoughts; they are being bullied/cyberbullied.
- *A question posed on the call: While it's great if a Little can and feels safe to come out to a parent, is it okay if a Little never comes out to their parent? Because for some, it's not an ideal situation for them to come out. Response: If a parent isn't supportive, providing the child a mentor who is an informed ally can be extremely helpful. We always want the youth to be safe.*

Helping a Parent/Family Come to a Supportive Place

- If the Little decides to come out to their parent/guardian/family, be the best support you can to the youth as they go through the process.

- Have patience with the process while ensuring the Little can and will remain safe in their home.
- Take time to build trust with the parent/guardian as it can eventually help as you try to provide educational opportunities for them.
- Research some resources to provide families – one notable organization providing these resources + supports is PFLAG. They have many chapters that hold meetings for families and youth throughout the nation. Many are still hosting virtual sessions.
- If/when the parent/family is supportive, agencies could connect with them to help other parents/families come to a supportive place themselves.

Addressing our Binary Agency Name

- Address it upfront with vulnerability, don't wait for others to bring it up.
- Use pronoun pins and share your pronouns when speaking to our agency constituents.
- Try to use "Big" and "Mentor" as often as you can, instead of Big Brother and Big Sister. Notably when promoting the program to the public and also when you don't know a person's identity.
- Promote the agency's inclusion in all marketing and communications.
- Use a brand for your LGBTQ initiatives, such as "Big Pride" or something similar.

Denial of Volunteers who are not accepting of LGBTQ youth

- Some affiliates might not automatically reject, depending on the level of acceptance shown for the LGBTQ community. Some people might lie in what has been called the "movable middle."
- Corrine Castro Workplace
Post: <https://bbbs.workplace.com/groups/132445937411655/permalink/780267765962799/>
- Many affiliates generally don't accept volunteers that are not accepting of LGBTQ youth. It isn't known if or when LGBTQ youth will come out to the agency or the Big, and if the Big is unsupportive, that would be an unsafe space for the child.
- Implement Coming Out scenarios into your new mentor training (and ongoing as needed).

Resource Link Topic Focus: Pronouns: <https://www.mypronouns.org/>

- This website provides a lot of information and resources on the importance of using pronouns, how to use pronouns, etc. There are many other guides in existence, but this is an all-encompassing site to which affiliates regularly reference.

Resource Link Topic Focus – Religion:

- https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/lgbtq-religion/
- PFLAG - [How to Stop Arguing About Religion but Make Your Point](#)

Organizations listed during the call:

- [PFLAG](#) – supporting LGBTQ youth, parents and families, ally resources
- [The Trevor Project](#) – suicide hotline and mental health resources
- [HRC](#) – training, conferences, partnerships
- [GLSEN – work with/within schools](#)
- Trans Youth Family Allies www.imatyfa.org
- Jacksonville Florida – [JASMYN](#)
- Chicago area – [Youth Outlook](#)

Link to Recording:

[Call Recording - LGBTQ Youth Coming Out Learning Hub](#)

- Access this link for the entire conversation and specific scenarios (with context) shared by affiliates – *please keep internal to BBBS network; this recording should not be shared with Bigs, families, or other partners. Thank you!*

Volunteer Guide Best Practices



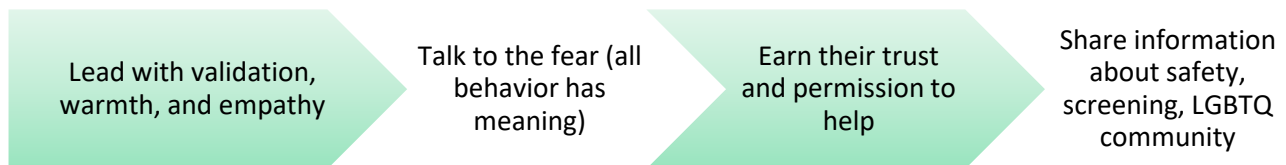
We hope every Big will grow in their allyship as their Little ages and may identify as LGBTQ+. An Ally is a person who supports and accepts LGBT people, and advocates for equal rights and fair treatment. Below are some tips on how to support your Little if they were to come out to you. It is important to remember to keep their coming out as confidential unless your Little gives permission to share.

Know the facts: According to the CDC, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24. LGBTQ+ youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of heterosexual youth.

How should you respond if your Little were to come out to you?

- ❖ Your first response is extremely important. Active listening, empathy and vulnerability are key in helping youth identify and express emotions, and for you to understand them.
- ❖ Your face expression, voice tone, and body language are part of this communication
- ❖ Everyone has values, but mentorship should focus on helping young people develop their own internal values
- ❖ When working with trans or gender expansive youth, acceptance and support are your most important tools
- ❖ Ask questions to get information and permission to help
- ❖ This includes inviting your Little to come out to their BBBS Match Support Specialist and referring them to resources of support in the community.

Responding to Parents/Guardians



SOGIE + Best Practices





Confidentiality of Youth Who are Coming-out and/or Transitioning Policy

Youth have the right to confidentiality around their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Agency staff will hold in confidence any youth's disclosures related to the youth's gender identity or expression and/or sexual orientation if youth does not want that information shared, unless otherwise legally obligated to do so. Agency staff will encourage youth to find a safe and supported way to share this information when the youth is ready to do so. Agency staff will follow the youth's lead and assist with any disclosures around their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, should they decide to share this information with their Big, Parent/Guardian, or other agency staff.

In addition, for youth who are transitioning, agency staff will follow the youth's lead and use the youth's preferred name and pronouns in settings that will not break confidentiality and have been approved by the youth. Agency staff will provide the youth with developmentally appropriate, LGBTQ+ inclusive referrals and resources and will encourage Bigs and parents/guardians to assist Littles in finding a safe and supported way to share this information with BBBSM staff and/or others when the youth is ready to do so.

Should the Parent/Guardian ask for guidance from agency staff regarding supporting the youth and/or family, BBBSM staff will provide developmentally appropriate, LGBTQ+, inclusive referrals and resources.

Agency staff, to the best of their ability, will remain apprised to community resources for the intent to connect all match parties with the appropriate programs or tools necessary to holistically support the Little.