



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel

WHEN YOU SAY GOODBYE

Becoming a Big can mean both the beginning and the ending of a special kind of friendship, one that is often close and unique. Matches end for a variety of reasons and at different stages in the friendship. How the ending is handled can be crucial to how a Little is able to view future relationships. If an ending is not positive, and leaves the Little without the opportunity to discuss and resolve his/her feelings, it may make it more difficult for this child to enter into and to trust in future relationships. However, with appropriate support and an opportunity to say “good-bye”, that same Little may in fact hold onto treasured memories and feel good about his/her role in this special friendship. The ending can also help him/her to be better prepared to deal with future separations which will be inevitable in his/her life.

The following are recommendations to assist you, as the Big, to say good-bye to your Little in a manner that will be constructive and help him/her in the future.

- Talk to your caseworker first and as soon as you know that you must end the match. The caseworker is both familiar with your relationship and has also assisted in the conclusion of a number of matches. Together you can discuss and plan the best way to inform your Little and his/her caregiver about the timing and the steps in the parting.
- The caseworker will help you involve the parent or the Little’s caregiver in the goodbye process.. If informed, this person can be very helpful in facilitating and supporting your plan to say goodbye.
- Expect that this process will not be easy. That’s OK. The sadness is a reflection of the caring and good times that will be missed. Your Little may go through some familiar stages in a grieving process. The following are some stages and suggestions on how to respond:

| Stage | Symptoms | Response |
|--------------|---|---|
| Denial | Denial that the relationship is ending and denial of the feelings that go with this ending. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be clear and concrete that the relationship is ending ▪ Don’t beat around the bush ▪ Acknowledge that there will be an end and this is hard for both of you |
| Anger | Directly in words or indirectly in actions about the friendship ending | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accept the anger ▪ Acknowledge it ▪ Help the Little to talk it out rather than acting out |

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| Mourning | Expression (in words or actions) of sadness about the end | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It's OK to cry ▪ It's good for both of you to share sad feelings ▪ Don't deny them ... they're there ▪ Getting feelings out means that they won't be festering on the inside |
| Independence | Being aloof, alone, finding others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Let this happen ▪ Don't take it personally ▪ Your Little is "trying on" what it will be like without you in his/her life |
| "Farewell Party" Syndrome | Romanticizing about the relationship, denying negative aspects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help your Little to remember both the positives and the negatives in the friendship and to expect that no relationship will be perfect all the time |

➤ If at all possible, plan ahead. Tell your Little about the ending. Talk about his/her feelings. Share yours. Give him/her time to reflect and go through the stages. Use the following to help with the discussion for both of you: "Our favorite activities were..." "I will always remember when we..." "I learned from you that..." "What will your best memory be?" "We both had a hard time when..." "What did you not enjoy?" "Having a Big or Little meant that..."

➤ Be prepared that your Little's reaction may not be what you expect. Each child will react differently. Just because your Little doesn't appear sad in front of you, doesn't mean that he/she won't or doesn't feel that loss, or that he/she doesn't care.

➤ Don't make promises you won't or can't keep. **This is crucial!!** If you don't follow through with a promise, you may undo all the good that you have done. Children hang onto promises...and they are kept hanging. It is better to create a pleasant surprise than to create a desperate hope and unfinished business.

➤ Don't promise a rematch with a new volunteer. This is not your call. It will involve the parent/caregiver, the caseworker, the child and the agency. They will take into consideration many factors in the child's life.

Beginnings cannot exist without endings. You have contributed significantly to a child's life and your impact can be meaningful even after you are gone. The ending of this relationship can be a growing and learning experience for your Little. Please help make it a positive one!

Thank you from everyone at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel