



STAYING CONNECTED

WHILE SOCIALLY DISTANT

COMMUNICATION TIPS

5 Tips for Staying Connected

Being unable to see your Little face-to-face may present some new challenges to your relationship, but the tips below can help you navigate these difficulties as you continue growing together as a match through this period of social distancing.

1. **Stay Consistent. However you choose to connect, your consistency now is more important to your Little than ever.** Find days, times, and methods that work best for both of you: create a plan, set a schedule, and stick to it! This will make things easier on you both while giving you each something to look forward to and depend on.
2. **Ask Questions.** It's no surprise that everyone's experiencing upheaval in their day-to-day schedules. Reaching out and chatting with your Little and their parent/guardian about when it's best to reach out – what days and time are easiest? how you can help? – are questions that'll be enormously helpful to keeping you (and your Little!) connected. Having difficulty coming up with things to talk about that aren't coronavirus-related? Check out these lists of [200 Would You Rather](#) and [63 Get-to-Know-You](#) questions for kids.
3. Talk with your Little's Caregiver to determine whether video calls are an option. Some great apps for those are [FaceTime](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Skype](#), or [Zoom](#).
4. Your Little may not feel comfortable talking on the phone, but that doesn't mean they don't want to hear from you. Send a note in the mail to let them know you care about them, and include a stamped envelope for their reply. Or send an email to your Little and their Caregiver.
5. Snail mail is still a thing... and it's great for activities! Write letters to your Little, send postcards, pass along some print-at-home games (like these [puzzles](#) or [coloring pages](#)), or send them a homemade craft kit.

Text-based Communication Tips

[MENTOR The National Mentoring Partnership](#) has offered these helpful tips for text-based communication.

- **Avoid closed questions** that could easily be a conversation-killer when responded to with a short response by your Little.
- **Use emojis, GIFs, memes, and other “digital” flourishes** to convey emotions, make messages more visually appealing, explain complex nuances, and inject some humor into interactions. The more of these digital “assets” adults can use in their text communications, the better. Meme culture in particular is a digital language that is familiar to most youth and might help them feel more connected or understood. However, we recommend only using these types of content when the conversation is fairly light.
- **Use appropriate self-disclosure** to let mentees know their perspectives are understood. Obviously, most of us have not been through a pandemic before. But chances are adults have experienced some of the emotions youth are feeling right now – we have all felt uncertain, isolated, or anxious. Sometimes sharing a personal experience lets your Little know you understand their feelings and concerns, which can go a long ways toward building trust and opening up more dialogue.

- **Avoid language that could be easily misunderstood.** Conversation tools such as sarcasm, irony, and “gallows’ humor” may all seem appropriate in a crisis, but these types of communication are much more clearly experienced in-person and successful text-based matches tend to avoid using language that could be misinterpreted. Participants in text-based matches were especially clear to label things such as dry humor and sarcasm as “a joke” to avoid ambiguity about intent.
- **Address misunderstandings in conversations when they occur.** If two people communicate via text long enough, it’s extremely likely one participant will take issue with the tone, content, or “meaning” of a given message. What’s critical is that you talk it through and clear up any misconceptions that may linger into future interactions.

Video Call Tips, Tricks, and How-To’s

Many adults are used to video chat platforms like Zoom, Skype, or Facetime. However, depending on the device your Little uses or the apps they’re familiar with, they might not be comfortable navigating those platforms. So instead, try out video call features on popular social media apps your Little already uses.

- **Reminder: BBBSEMO Electronic Communication Guidelines state:**
 - Parent/Guardian Permission Is Vital – Talk with your Little’s guardian before connecting with them on social media.
 - Keep Private Things Private – rMake sure to customize your privacy settings to reflect the amount of information you want to share with your Little and their family. You can also model safe behavior by being careful about what you share online.
 - Online Safety Is Important – Encourage your Little to use privacy settings on their pages, and to talk with their parent about things they see, things they do, and people they talk to online.
- **Facebook:** Open the Messenger app on your phone or computer. Open a conversation with the person or people you want to video chat with. Click the video icon at the top right corner of the window to send a video invite.
- **Instagram:** Tap the paper airplane icon at the top right corner of your screen to access your Direct Messages. Tap the video camera icon at the top right corner. Select people from the list below or tap Search to search for someone. The person or group you call will receive a notification that you’re calling them. Once you’ve connected your video call, you can access all of Instagram’s many filters to use during the call for some added fun!
- **Snapchat:** To request a Video Chat, open a Chat and tap the video camera icon. You can swipe down on a Video Chat to minimize it. Tap it to go back into a full-screen Chat. Please Note: Your friends may be able to view your video before they answer your call. Just like Instagram, Snapchat’s Face Lenses are also available during video calls.

Discussion Topics

Distance Learning

Last week's announcement of school buildings staying closed through the end of the school year brought up many emotions for us all. Check in with your Little, asking how they felt about the announcement. Some other discussion points:

- How have school assignments been going?
- Have you been able to talk to your teacher?
- What do you like about doing school at home? What's challenging about it?
- Do you have a place to keep your school work?
- Ask your Little to set one personal goal for something they want to achieve during the time away from school, and then periodically check in on their progress. Maybe you could both learn something together!

Stress Relief (for younger Littles)

This is a stressful time for everyone, including your Little. Ask them how they de-stress, and offer some suggestions, such as:

- Do you have a favorite song or singer that helps you unwind?
- Is there a picture you like to look at that makes you happy?
- Who do you talk to when you get worried?
- Have you ever tried a breathing exercise to take your mind off of things? If not, try these on your phone call:
 - *Rainbow Breathing*: Ask your Little to sit comfortably with their eyes closed and practice breathing in for a count of four, holding for four, then breathing out for four. Take an imaginary walk on a rainbow while practicing deep breathing. Ask your Little to think about their favorite red things on the red stripe, orange things on orange, and continue until you finish the rainbow.
 - *Balloon Breathing*: Blowing up balloons is a great metaphor for kids because they understand that to inflate a balloon you need to use controlled breathing. Ask your Little to close their eyes and count their breathing while imagining that they're inflating a balloon of their favorite color. When the balloon is full, cue your Little to visualize the balloon floating away into the clouds.
 - *Guided Imagery*: Some kids enjoy storytelling, and this can be a great way to calm the senses while engaging in deep breathing. Have your Little sit comfortably with their eyes closed and ask them to describe an imaginary place they would like to visit. While your Little focuses on their breathing, take them on a guided trip to their calming destination. Be sure to provide gentle reminders about slow, deep breathing along the journey.
 - These techniques were offered in an article featuring ideas on how mentors can help mentees reduce stress. [Check it out](#) for more information and helpful tips.

Family Relationships

With schools closed and stay-at-home orders in place, your Little is spending a lot more time with their siblings, parents, and other family members at home. Now is a great time to learn more about the people your Little lives with:

- How have you been getting along with your siblings and parent(s)/caregiver?
- Being in close quarters with family members can lead to increased tensions. What is one way you can show your family members you care about them, even when you're feeling frustrated?
- What are activities you like doing with your family? What activities do you prefer to do by yourself?
- Do you have other family members – cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles – that you miss right now? How are you staying in touch with them?
- Make a family tree, and ask your Little to do the same. Share them with each other on a video call.

Stress Relief (for Teens)

Talking with your teenage Little about stress can be different than talking with younger kiddos. A few tips for you:

- *Understand their frustration over not seeing friends.* Bonding with peers is one of the essential developmental tasks of adolescents. If your Little is unhappy or upset about being stuck at home with parents and siblings, a direct conversation might be helpful
- *Encourage healthy habits.* Losing routines you've come to rely on can be a big source of stress, so encourage your Little to establish new routines. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, with predictable times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood.
- *Validate their disappointment.* Youth are understandably wondering how this will affect their futures. Give them room to share how they are feeling and acknowledge the real stress they may be under. Then express confidence in your Little's ability to rebound.
- *Help them practice mindfulness.* Mindfulness teaches us to tune into our emotions in any given moment and experience them without judgment. Practicing "radical acceptance" lets us sit *with* our emotions rather than fighting *against* them.

Activities

Entertainment & Games

- Watch a movie together via **Airtime** or Netflix Party. These apps allow you and friends to watch a movie together in real time. If you, your Little, and their parent/guardian decide to download it, be sure the movie you choose to watch together is age-appropriate and one you all agree on!
- Have a **Game Night**
 - Make use of free apps like Words with Friends or Draw Something that allow you to play games with your Little but respond when it's convenient for each of you.
 - If you have the same video game system, play the same game together and talk to each other through the system.
 - [Board Game Arena](#): Play games directly in your browser. Free to create an account. No download necessary.
 - Facebook: Locate the Games tab under Facebook's Explore Menu, and gain access to games like Uno, Phase 10, Words with Friends, Draw Something, and more. Once you select a game, you can add players from your Friend List.
 - [Sketchful.io](#): free online Pictionary
 - [Taboo](#): An online version of the classic game of unspeakable fun
 - [Uno](#): Free download from Google Play and the App Store. You can even send voice messages to your friends during games!
- Learn the **TikTok dances** your Little keeps telling you about, or learn a new one together, and have a virtual dance-off.
- Participate in a scavenger hunt together. Find different items around your home at the same time, and then share them with each other. You might just learn something new about your Little in the process. Check out [this resource](#) for pre-made scavenger hunt ideas.
- Work on a puzzle "Together" and support Big Brothers Big Sisters at the same time! For every puzzle ordered, BBBSA will be sending a puzzle to a Little. You can even designate your Little to receive the gifted puzzle at check-out. Order yours [here](#)!

Learning Opportunities

- Virtual Book Club: Read the same book together, and discuss each chapter with each other
- Take virtual tours of [museums](#), [national parks](#), and even [Mars](#). Share your favorite discovery with your Little and ask about theirs.
- Learn a new language together using [Duolingo](#), or similar apps. Practice your new skill on the phone when you call or incorporate the phrases you learn in your texts/notes.

Arts & Crafts

- Start a quarantine time capsule. Check out [this resource](#) for ideas of things to include keep it going.

- Send craft/activity supplies to your Little. Swap your creations when in-person outings resume. **If you choose this option, BBBSEMO recommends mailing supplies or leaving items in a package on your Little's porch. **
- Send YouTube videos—like [this channel](#)—with how-to crafting videos, and then have your Little send you a picture of their creation.
- Already have a scrapbook of your match going, or want to start one? Drop off or mail some supplies and pictures to your Little's home. You can each work on separate pages, re-living some of your favorite memories and making plans to repeat favorite outings once BBBSEMO social distancing policies have been lifted.
- Challenge your Little to engineer an animal out of objects found in their home. Join in the challenge and compare your creations over video chat.

Writing Letters & Journals

- Assemble a letter-writing packet, including pre-addressed envelopes and stamps to better ensure a response from your Little. Encourage drawings, puzzles, coloring pages, or other ways for your Little to express themselves.
- Create a shared journal via **Google Docs** where you both detail your days for each other. Bonus: [some prompts to help you out](#).
 - Or document your days via pictures and send them to each other.

Meals & More Resources

- Share a meal “together”. Order the same meal to be delivered to you and your Little’s family, and then video chat so it’s like you’re eating together.
- Our friends at [Girl Scouts USA](#) have developed new online resources that they have generously shared with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Check out their website for a wide variety of activities – from STEM experiments and cyber scavenger hunts to drawing lessons and building projects – each broken down by age groups from kindergarten through 12th grade