

# RELATIONSHIP LIFE CYCLE

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## INITIAL DISCOVERY

Meeting your Little Brother/Sister begins your discovery phase.

- ◆ It is very important to remember that it is up to you, not the child, to use your skills to develop a relationship.
- ◆ Acknowledge feelings of anxiety; if you are nervous or sense that your Little Brother/Sister is anxious, talk about it.
- ◆ Use listening skills, validating, and self-disclosure to get to know your Little Brother/Sister while sharing about yourself.
- ◆ After each activity, take time to talk about what worked and what did not work for you and your Little Brother/Sister.
- ◆ Express feelings using "I" messages rather than trying to cover up your emotions and pretend all is fine.
- ◆ Ask questions about your Little Brother's/Sister's life and in following conversations refer back to what you learned.

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## SURPRISE/CHALLENGE

Surprise, surprise! Seldom is a relationship exactly what you expected. There will be delightful experiences and there will be challenges that help you and your Little Brother/Sister grow. Here are common surprises reported by Big Brothers/Sisters.

- ◆ Your Little Brother/Sister is not as needy as you thought he/she would be.
- ◆ Your expectations are not met.
- ◆ You and your Little Brother/Sister have discovered that you have some interests in common that you really enjoy sharing.
- ◆ Your friendship seems to flourish all by itself.
- ◆ Your relationship does not develop as quickly as you believed it would.
- ◆ Your match is more work than fun.

- ◆ You discover your Little Brother's/Sister's strengths and positive qualities.
- ◆ Your Little Brother/Sister is not sharing much of him/herself.
- ◆ As you get to know your Little Brother/Sister, you learn a lot about yourself.
- ◆ You look forward to spending time with your Little Brother/Sister; he/she has become an important part of your life.
- ◆ Your Little Brother/Sister does not seem appreciative.
- ◆ Your Little Brother's/Sister's social skills are not improving in spite of your efforts.
- ◆ You find becoming part of a child's life opens the door to new experiences for you.

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## **RESOLUTION/RESPONSE**

Some of your discoveries can simply be appreciated and enjoyed while others will require a response to resolve challenges and strengthen your relationship. Most situations will be easily solved with your own skills and resources. Some will require the assistance of your Match Support Specialist.

- ◆ Remember, you are the adult and responsible for the health of the relationship.
- ◆ Clearly communicate, explaining what you would appreciate in terms of behavior; you may have to set clear limits and develop appropriate consequences.
- ◆ Whenever you feel stuck, call your Match Support Specialist and talk about your experience.
- ◆ Teach your Little Brother/Sister by modeling behavior that you would like to see.
- ◆ Build trust through consistency, being non-judgmental, and accepting where your Little Brother/Sister is developmentally.
- ◆ Remember to follow the ground rules.
- ◆ **KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR!**

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## **EXPANSION/GROWTH**

Periods of growth are rewarding and pleasurable, but they do not last forever. They are a part of the ongoing process of a relationship. Your role as a Big Brother/Sister requires continual nurturing, attention, and commitment.

- ◆ You and your Little Brother/Sister are more at ease being together; you are friends.
- ◆ You have fun and enjoy each other.
- ◆ You find that your expectations are more realistic.
- ◆ Your Little Brother/Sister has come to trust you.

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## **PREPARATION**

Here the cycle begins again. Your Little Brother's/Sister's developmental needs will change, and there will be changes in both of your lives. Awareness of these will help you prepare to meet the constantly fluctuating needs of your relationship.

- ◆ Learn about changes in developmental needs, such as grade levels, puberty, social involvement, or activities.
- ◆ Ask questions of your Case Manager.
- ◆ Avoid getting stuck in a rut.
- ◆ Keep a humorous perspective.
- ◆ Check to see if your expectations are realistic.
- ◆ **MAINTAIN TRUST BY STAYING CONSISTENT!**

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## **ONGOING DISCOVERY**

If you do not become complacent, you will discover even more about your Little Brother/Sister and yourself. Thus, you will find that you and your Little Brother/Sister have begun the cycle again.