



BRIGHT MINDS

EMPOWER. ACHIEVE. INSPIRE.

PARENT AND CAREGIVER ORIENTATION GUIDE





ABOUT BRIGHT MINDS

Bright Minds has been bringing a little magic into the lives of children by matching them with adult volunteers in fun and rewarding relationships.

Welcome

We need you to be an active Partner.

Working together, Parents/Caregivers, volunteers, and Bright Minds staff members plan activities and opportunities that can have a powerful and positive impact on your child.

Purpose of *Bright Minds*

The mission of Bright Minds is to make a positive impact in the lives of children and youth and to assist them in becoming confident, competent and caring individuals by providing them with caring and responsible adult mentors. A mentor in the Bright Minds program is a relationship where in a volunteer provides guidance, friendship and activities for a child who has a special need for an outside adult relationship. The focus of the program is in establishing a one-on-one relationship between the adult and child. We believe that a positive association with a man or woman is most influential in helping a child to become a responsible adult.

Each child is carefully evaluated to determine his or her special needs. Based



on these needs, match goals are developed to guide the volunteer throughout the course of the match. The staff is available to support and supervise the relationship in hopes that a child's life will be enriched through the special friendship between the volunteer and the child.



WHO ARE OUR **MENTORS**?

- Men and women who work and live in your community
- High school and college Mentees from nearby schools
- Retirees, military men and women, members of congregations or civic organizations, and...
- Just ordinary people that are extraordinary!

What they all have in common is a sincere interest in being a friend and mentor to a child. They are not paid – all of their time is volunteered.



HOW DO WE SELECT VOLUNTEER MENTORS?

Each volunteer must complete a screening process that includes:

- A written application
- A criminal history check, child abuse registry check and DMV check
- At least three personal references
- An in-person interview
- Questions about their home environment
- A professional decision about whether they should volunteer with a child
- An orientation and training process that will help to encourage your child's healthy development
- Bright Minds also provides supervision and child safety tips to you and your child, and we welcome your questions and feedback



WHO ARE OUR **MENTEES**?



Most children in our program come to us through their parent or caregiver. When they get together, what do matches do?

They typically meet at least 4 hours per month and do fun activities at a tour facility. They might bake a cake or build a bird house.

They do things that they both enjoy doing.

You as a parent or caregiver should know about each activity and give your approval in advance.

When your child returns home from an activity with their Mentor, it's very important that you talk openly with them about the activity.

Make sure that your child feels okay when they're with their Mentor.



BRIGHT MINDS SUPPORT

How Bright Minds Works with You, Your Child & Mentor

Bright Minds Support Specialists work hard to support the relationship between Mentors and Mentees. Our goal is for the relationship to be as successful as possible for everyone. Mentors and Mentees work with their Support Specialist/Team from their Bright Minds organization.



It is important for us to talk with you every month for the first year of the match. This allows us to provide support, and offer ideas if problems arise. We will also contact you regularly.

Your Support specialist is the main link between you, your child, the Mentor and the organization.

That's not all that the Support Team provides for your child's mentor. They also:

- Find information and resources that you might be interested in
- Connect you with community resources
- Keep you updated on activities offered by the organization
- Help you communicate with your child and their Mentor
- Work with you on any conflicts that might come up



Here are some good reasons for calling your Support Specialist:

- To question your child's safety or well-being
- Discuss general concerns you are having about the Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister
- Report any changes in address or phone number
- Report any emergency situations or your child's illness
- Report any important family changes
- Report success stories about your child's progress or special honors

Contact your Support specialist by phone and/or email, which ever is most convenient for you.

If your Support specialist is not available please contact the organization for assistance. We make it a priority to serve you when you need it.





YOUR ROLE

We need you to be an active partner!

We know it takes a special parent / caregiver to get a Mentor for their child.

Parents/care givers are important partners in helping to build a meaningful friendship between their children and volunteers.

What you can do to help:

Be welcoming to your child's Mentor! Talk to your Bright Minds Support staff!

- Share your concerns, hopes and wishes for your child with your Bright Minds Support Specialist. He/she will tell these to your child's Mentor and help them in planning activities that are fun and educational.
- Help find the best times for outings to occur, and make sure that your child is prepared: proper clothing, ready on time
- Make sure that you know details of each planned activity (and have given your approval in advance)
- Always ask about what the activities were and your child's feelings about the visit.
- During the first year, monthly calls or visits from your Bright Minds Support Specialist are required. You can discuss your child's experiences: what activities have they been involved in, what does your child say about the outings? What makes them happy about being in the program?
- Please don't talk about your child with the Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister when the child is present. If there is something you think they should know, call them when your child is away.



- Please don't ask that siblings be included. This is special for your child. Do participate in events and organization sponsored activity that invite Parents to join in.
- Mentors are "older friends." They are not substitute parents, baby sitters, disciplinarians, financial support, taxi service, or counselors.
- Time with a Mentor is special. Don't punish your child by saying they can't see their Mentor. Often, this one-on-one adult time will actually help your child's overall behavior.
- Be flexible. Remember that the Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister is a volunteer, and has a busy schedule too. Both you and the volunteer should make sure to call ahead to cancel any planned visits.
- Give it time: This relationship needs time to develop – at least three months – so don't judge it too quickly.

OUTSIDE VISIT POLICY

Bright Minds does not allow any visits outside of facility grounds in any location between a volunteer and client during the first six months of a match. Volunteers are advised of this policy during their initial training. The parent/guardian and child are informed during the intake process. This information also appears in both the parent hand book and the volunteer handbook.

After six months, the volunteer may conduct an outside visit, if the volunteer, client, parent or legal guardian and Support Staff member are all in agreement. The Support Specialist must be contacted before and after the visit for a report.

Remember, we all have the same goal – the health and well-being of your child!

In summary, the top rules are:

1. Know what your child is doing with their Mentor
2. Communicate any concerns to Bright Minds staff



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, not just at the beginning.

CHILD PROTECTION AT BRIGHT MINDS:

We want to work together to keep your child safe. While our staff carefully screens each volunteer, we need your help to make sure the relationship is healthy and the volunteer is making good judgments about your child's safety on outings.

- You should approve all activities; if you are not comfortable with an activity that your Mentor suggests, you are encouraged to not approve. Talk to your Bright Minds Support staff when you have questions.
- When your Mentor meets your child at the facility, the Mentor should always stay with them and not leave them with someone else.
- Your child's Mentor should not use physical discipline or yell at your child.
- Volunteers should never ask a child to keep a secret.
- Volunteers might want to buy an occasional gift for your child. They should ask your advice about this first.
- Volunteers should not engage in tickling, wrestling, giving back-rubs, or asking a child to sit on their lap.
- Of course, showing pornography or sexual material is never acceptable.



Here are some patterns that you should discuss with your Bright Minds' Support Staff:

- Your child's Mentor wants to spend more and more time with your child
- Your child's Mentor often invites other children to join them in activities (siblings, child's friends, etc.)
- Activities always take place in private settings such as a volunteer's home, camping setting - instead of more public settings or at the facility
- Your child's Mentor takes an excessive amount of pictures or videos of your child

We know that you work with your child to teach them skills to help keep them safe from violence – whether it's online, at school, at home and in your community. Please feel free to discuss these issues and any other issues related to child safety with your Bright Minds Support Staff. We want to work with you to keep your child safe.



***IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PARENTS COMMUNICATE
OPENLY AND OFTEN ON THESE SUBJECTS.***

Here are some patterns that you should discuss with your Bright Minds' Support Staff:

REQUIRED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

Bright Minds staff members are required to report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child. Our staff and volunteers are trained to respond if a child tells them about abuse. A report will be filed with authorities.

If you have any further questions or would like more information on violence prevention, please don't hesitate to ask our staff for additional resources.

If at any time you suspect that your child is being harmed, please contact Bright Minds' staff for support.





GROUND RULES

- It is extremely important for the Mentee to be clean, properly dressed, and ready when the Mentor arrives.
- The relationship with the Mentor is a friendship, which does not always include the spending of money. Please help your child understand this.
- Do not involve the Mentor in family problems or ask the Mentor for money, transportation or baby sitting services.
- Please don't discuss your child with the Mentor in the presence of your child. If you think there is something you need to share, call when your child is away.
- Let the volunteer know that his/her efforts are appreciated. Help your child to be considerate of the Mentor (i.e., saying thank you, making occasional phone calls, remembering birthdays).
- Remember, the relationship that exists is between your child and the Mentor. Don't ask that siblings or yourself be included.
- Remember, the Mentor is not a trained professional – nor perfect. You will probably disagree with the volunteer sometimes.
- The parent / guardian should not deprive the child of visits with the Mentor as a means of discipline.
- Be flexible. Remember the Mentor has a busy schedule too.
- If there is something about the relationship that concerns you, contact the Support Specialist immediately.
- This relationship needs time to develop – at least 3 months – don't judge too quickly.
- Your child's Mentor is a person, too. Communication with him/her is vital for a healthy match.
- Maintain regular contact with your Support Specialist and respond promptly to calls and letters. It is mandatory that the Parent and Support Specialist maintain regular monthly contact. If you do not have a phone, make a conscious effort to call your Support Specialist each month.



THE MATCH



MENTOR-MENTEE ASSIGNMENT

Matching a Mentor with a Mentee is a thoughtful process. The interests of the Mentor are carefully considered, as are the needs, personality, and interests of the Mentee. Once the volunteer is ready for assignment, the Inquiry & Enrollment Specialist will conduct a file showing in the office with him/her. Confidentiality is a must, as the volunteer will be given an open and honest profile of the child based on all available information.

When the Mentor accepts an assignment, a mutually agreeable time is worked out for the introduction of the Mentor to the Mentee at the facility.

INTRODUCTION

The appointed hour of introduction can be a nervous time for all parties. Both Mentors and Mentees often wonder, "Will I like him or her?" and "Will he or she like me?"

The Inquiry & Enrollment Specialist and your assigned Support Specialist will be present for the introduction of the Mentor and Mentee. During the match meeting, policies and expectations are discussed. The Mentor, Mentee, and Parent/Guardian also sign a moral contract agreeing to uphold their responsibilities for a successful match.



Following the introduction of the Mentor to the Mentee and the parent(s)/guardian(s), the Mentor generally suggests to his Mentee that they go for a soda, ice cream, etc. Usually this first contact is brief, but it provides an opportunity for both parties to begin to get to know each other without other family members being present. During this time, the Mentor talks with the Mentee about their next "get together". It is very important for the Mentor to have an activity planned within a week after introduction. After returning to the home, the Mentor discusses with the parent/guardian the date, time, and activity for the next meeting.

DURING THE MATCH

The Parent's/Guardian's actions play an important role in the friendship of the Mentee and the Mentor. To show support for the relationship, the parent/guardian should follow the guidelines outlined for the match and encourage the child to take some responsibility in developing the friendship with the Mentor. Help your child remember to try new activities, say thank you, and not insist on having his/her own way.

Volunteers are encouraged to concentrate on the child, not on costly activities. From time to time, Mentors may not be able to keep the time commitment. The volunteer should notify you in advance. Try to be understanding and flexible in rescheduling.

MATCH CLOSURE

There are circumstances when the match must officially end. People are transferred or move, personal or business demands increase, or occasionally the relationship never "jelled". Volunteers are requested to commit one year to each match. The match may last longer, but the requirement is for one year only.

Ending a relationship is hard for anyone, particularly a child, but it is better to close the match than "fade away". Planning for closure is equally as important as matching, and we cannot emphasize strongly enough the necessity of discussing your plans with the staff. At least a month before the match ends, you and the Support Specialist can prepare the child for the end of the match. The staff also needs your input to assist in evaluating a possible reassignment.



Occasionally, circumstances require closure of a match through staff intervention. This usually occurs when organization expectations have not been met and/or our ground rules have not been followed.

Reasons for closure would include any behavior or conduct not in the best interest of the child or organization, such as, but not limited to, the following

- 1.The Mentor does not see the Mentee regularly and consistently.
- 2.An intimate relationship develops between the Mentor and parent/guardian.
- 3.The Mentor, parent/guardian, or significant other engages in abusive or inappropriate conduct toward the Mentee.
- 4.A Mentor, Mentee or parent/guardian fails to cooperate with the organization guidelines (i.e., the parent/guardian or Mentor fails to stay in contact with the Support Specialist).
- 5.Unresolved personality conflicts exist between the Mentor, Mentee, and/or parent/guardian.
- 6.The parent/guardian wishes the Mentor to take on a parental role (i.e., wants the Mentee to live with him/her, etc.)

MATCH CLOSURE

Notice shall be sent to the Mentor and the parent stating the effective date of closure. In some cases, a suspension of the match for a specific time period might occur prior to the more extreme step of closure. Any questions regarding the disposition of the cases shall be made in writing to the Executive Director who will review the case history and respond promptly.





CLIENT REMATCH ELIGIBILITY POLICY

A previously matched "Mentee" would not be eligible for rematch if:

- The child is past the re-match age –13 for boys,15 for girls.
- The child's previous match(es) lasted 12 months or longer, or
- The parent/guardian fails to complete re-match requirements as requested by the Support Specialist, or
- The staff is unable to complete periodic updates (due to relocation, non- response, or lack of cooperation by the parent/guardian) or
- The child and/or parent/guardian acted inappropriately during the first match.

Children who fall into one or more of the categories listed above would not return to (or remain on) the waiting list for a re-match. The files of these children would be closed, and the children would not be eligible for organization activities.

TIPS WHEN YOUR PHONE IS DISCONNECTED

During the course of your child's match, you may find yourself in the situation of not having a phone. In order to continue stability and weekly contact with your volunteer, we suggest that you and your child try the following tips:

1. Suggest to the Mentor a regular day each week for visits. With the help of a calendar, mark the days the Mentor is to pick up your child. You can also plan with the Mentor a certain time each week for you to call him/her.
2. Give the Mentor the phone number of a friend, neighbor, or church where he/she could leave messages for you.
3. Call the Mentor at his/her home or place of work if it is okay. Your child can call while they are at school, or you can call from a neighbor's, your church, our work phone or from a pay phone.
4. Keep your Mentor's address and phone number on a card. If you are unable to reach him/her by phone, send him/her a letter or postcard.



COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- Even when you are busy, make the time to talk with your child. Sometimes the best discussions take place while you are driving the car or cooking dinner.
- Listen to the “Mentee Stuff.” If they know you are listening, they are more likely to trust you enough to talk about everything in their life.
- Listen between the lines. Because most kids find it hard to talk about things that really matter, you need to listen hard to what they may be trying to say.
- Ask their opinion. We all like it when someone asks our opinion.



You don't have to ask about just important issues –ask them simple things too. Would they rather go visit Aunt Denise or Grandma today? Do they prefer McDonalds or Burger King? What do they enjoy doing most with their Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister?

- Don't interrupt. Give your children some extra time to explain their opinion or desires, even if you think you know what they are going to say.
- Catch them doing something good! Take that opportunity to praise them and tell them that you are proud of them.

FROM EVERYONE AT BRIGHT MINDS

THANK YOU!



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 Bright Minds Chicago, IL



BRIGHT MINDS

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CHILDREN:

1. How long will I have to wait to get a Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister (“Mentor”)?

We do not match on a first-come, first-served basis. In finding an appropriate mentor for a child, we match based on similar likes, interests, and personalities.

2. What will a Mentor do with me?

You and your Mentor will be able to pick activities together that both of you enjoy. Remember, your Mentor is not here to spend money on you but to spend time with you.

3. How often will I see my Mentor?

Our rules say that you and your Mentor are to get together at least two (2) to four (4) times a month for the first year you are matched. The actual days you get together will depend on your schedule, that of your parent’s/guardian’s, and the Mentor’s schedule.

4. How old will my Mentor be?

Our volunteers vary in age. If a volunteer is 17 and older and has a valid driver’s license, he/she is eligible to go through our screening process to become a Mentor.

- In some cases, an exception may be made for a 16-year-old volunteer, so long as he/she is at least a junior in high school and has a valid driver’s license.

5. Why does my Mentor never do anything I want to do?

The match with your Mentor is not about just doing the things you want to do; it’s about taking turns doing things both of you enjoy and learning new, exciting things about each other. Just keep in mind, for the most part, when you get matched with a Mentor, you will have some similar interests. This is also explained to your Mentor.

CHILDREN (CONT'D):

1. Why does my Mentor never spend money on me?

This program is not about “buying things” for their Mentee; it is about spending “time” with a Mentee. We ask Mentors to take care of expenses for certain activities they do together with their Mentee, like going out to eat, to the movies, etc. We also tell Mentors that they are welcome to buy small gifts for birthdays and Christmas. A Mentee is expected to bring his/her own money if he/she wishes to purchase items during the activity with their Mentor.

2. Can I spend time with my Mentor outside of the facility?

Our organization has an outside visit policy. We do not encourage outside visits, but it is allowed after six months from the match-up date as long as your parent/guardian, your Mentor, and you feel comfortable with this. It is necessary that you inform your Support Specialist of an outside visit before it takes place.

3. Will my Mentor help me with my homework?

This is not a tutoring program, but usually Mentors will occasionally help the Mentees with homework if asked by the Mentee.

4. My Mentor isn't as young as I hoped he/she would have been; can I get somebody younger?

Older volunteers are able to do many of the same things that a younger volunteer could do. We ask you about things that you really enjoy doing and then try to find a volunteer that likes some of the same things that you do. Talk to your Mentor about things that you would like to do with him/her.

5. My Mentor just wants to do boring stuff or just one thing whenever we get together?

Talk to your Mentor about things that you are interested in. Also, remember that if you do a bunch of things every time that you get together, you will run out of things to do.

PARENT/GUARDIAN:

1. How does Bright Minds screen their volunteers? How do I know this volunteer is safe?

There is a screening process that our volunteers go through before being able to be matched with a child. There is an interview process where at one point the Enrollment Specialist visits the volunteer in their home or wherever is the most convenient for them (examples include a local library, our organization, their workplace, etc.). We also do reference checks as well as police and driving record checks. We also make sure that the volunteers have adequate car insurance.

2. How much money does the program cost?

The program does not cost anything. Our organization or the volunteers are required to pay for the activities that they would be doing with your child; however, the spending is limited, and we ask that our volunteers refrain from buying gifts unless for a special reason like Christmas and birthdays. You are able to send extra spending money along if a child may want to purchase something at an outing or given activity.

3. Does my ex-husband have to consent to me applying for a Mentor Brother or Mentor Sister (“Mentor”) for my child?

The parent/guardian that has full custody of the child is the one who has authority to give consent. Any other family members or individuals do not have a say as to whether or not your child can be a part of Bright Minds. However, we do take into consideration the needs of your child and problems that may be caused if another individual or person in the home would not want a volunteer to be a part of your child’s life.

4. If I remarry, does this mean my child will have to stop seeing his/her Mentor?

Not necessarily. If your child has formed an established relationship with a Mentor, we would definitely encourage its continuance. However, we also do not want to cause any problems with forming a relationship with the new parent in the home. In this situation, you can talk with your Support Specialist at Bright Minds to decide what would be best for your child.

PARENT/GUARDIAN: (CONT'D)

1. Do I get to see the police and reference checks or interviews of my child's Mentor?

No, as we have a confidentiality policy. This policy also covers the information that we obtain from you about you and your family. Any information that is gathered about those in our program is kept confidential. We have volunteers as well as yourself sign a confidentiality policy. As mentioned, we have a thorough screening process and will give you demographic information about the volunteer who is chosen for your child.

2. Do you do drug tests on your volunteers?

No, we do not do drug tests, but we do have a drug and alcohol policy in our volunteer agreement, which all volunteers have to sign. It states that volunteers are required to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages before and during match activities as well as they must abstain from the use of illegal drugs while being a volunteer in our program.

3. What type of relationship am I to have with my child's Mentor?

The Mentor's role is primarily to spend one-on-one time with your child. It is okay to let a volunteer know about other instances that may be going on in your family, but remember that our volunteers are not trained therapists and are there to focus their time and attention on your child. We do encourage you to get to know your child's Mentor by asking him/her what activities are planned with your child; also, you should ask your child after each activity what he/she did with the Mentor and what they discussed. Keep your child's Mentor informed of areas in your child's life that are improving or that need to be improved so that the Mentor can help encourage your child in areas that need focus.

4. How long can my child keep his/her Mentor?

Once your child is in our program he/she can remain matched or on the waiting list till he/she is 18 or graduates high school as long as the match remains open—i.e. the Mentor and Mentee remain matched.

5. Can the Bright Minds program help my child with his/her school?

Keep in mind that this is not a tutoring program, but most of our volunteers are willing to assist a child with occasional homework or a specific project.

6. How long will my child have to wait before she/he gets matched with a Mentor?

This is not a first come first serve program. We match children and volunteers based upon factors such as personality, common interests, location, and other preferences. While children are waiting to be matched, we provide activities for them through our First Friends program. These activities take place primarily in the Fort Wayne area, but there are activities which occasionally take place in other counties. Generally girls are matched more quickly than boys because we do have a higher volume of female volunteers who are part of the program (versus male volunteers).

7. How do you find the right Mentor for my child?

As mentioned, we match children and volunteers based upon factors such as personality, common interests, location, and other preferences. During the interviews we have with you and your child, we ask questions such as: "What are you looking for in a volunteer?", and "What preferences do you have for your child's Mentor?" We also ask similar questions of the volunteers. The Enrollment Specialist takes into consideration these preferences and makes an assessment as to the volunteer we feel would be in the best interest of your child. It is very important that you are honest during the interviews so that we can find a successful match for your child.

8. What types of questions will I be asked during the interview?

All the information we obtain from you is treated confidentially. Many of the questions may seem rather personal, but we ask them to help us better understand your child and his/her needs. This will better enable us to be able to find the right volunteer for your child.

9. How often should my child's Mentor get together with my child?

It is our policy that matches should get together two (2) to four (4) times a month for at least a year. The days and times of these activities depend on your schedule and the Mentor's schedule. After the match's first year anniversary, we recommend the Mentor and the Mentee get together at least one (1) to two (2) times a month. Also, on the one-year anniversary of the match, your Support Specialist will meet with your child and his/her Mentor for a review; at that time you will discuss the continuation of their match with the Support Specialist.

10. How does the First Friends program work?

Once your child has been accepted into our program, he/she is placed on a waiting list. During this time, your child can participate in First Friends activities. These activities take place in small groups (example: 1 staff members and 4 – 5 children). We also have volunteers who will pick your child up along with one or two others and will take him/her to the activity, monitor your child there, and bring your child back home. Remember that most of these activities take place in the Fort Wayne area. So, if you live in another county and you want your child to come to some of these activities, you may need to provide your own transportation. Occasionally, activities are held in other counties outside Allen county for children on the waiting list in these counties; if you live in one of these counties, you will be informed of these events so that your child may attend them. Your child is able to attend these First Friends activities until he/she is matched with their own Mentor.

11. I don't feel that my child is getting together enough with his/her Mentor (e.g. once a month is just not enough). Could my child participate in First Friends activities, too?

If this is the situation, your Support Specialist will work with you and the Mentor to ensure that time requirements are being met. We only have a limited number of First Friends volunteers; so we only allow children who are on the waiting list to come to the activities. Remember that if your child is matched, he/she is getting interaction with a mentoring adult whereas other children who are still waiting do not have this opportunity except through First Friends. We can also refer you to other agencies or programs in the area which may provide additional resources and support for your child.

12. What do I do if I don't like the Mentor that you may choose for my child?

You do have the right to reject a Mentor we may have selected for your child. Remember, before matching your child with a Mentor we will give you a summary profile of the potential Mentor and let you decide whether or not you feel that this would be a good match for your child. If a Mentor is rejected, your child will then remain on the waiting list till we do find a suitable volunteer to match with your child.