



Big Brothers Big Sisters.
OF ORANGE COUNTY & THE INLAND EMPIRE

PARENT NEWSLETTER

MAY 2025

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BBBS TEAM



May is Mental Health Awareness Month, but for many families, mental health isn't something that comes up just once a year. It shows up in real and personal ways: shifting family dynamics, financial instability, the loss of someone important, or simply the emotional weight of the world our children are growing up in. These experiences may not always be visible, but they impact how kids show up in school, at home, and in relationships. And while children may seem to bounce back, we often hear from parents how hard those moments can still be to talk about—even long after they've passed.

At Big Brothers Big Sisters, our mission is to create and support mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of the next generation. That work begins with every match, where a young person is paired with a consistent, caring mentor. **We know mentorship is powerful on its own, and when paired with support that addresses the challenges shaping a child's daily life, it becomes even stronger.** Through our Program Support Services team, we help connect families to mental health care, community resources, and tools that make it easier to navigate what life brings.

In this issue our Parent Newsletter, we're focusing on emotional wellness and the importance of support—whether that's through a trusted adult, mental health services, or tools a family can use at home. This support isn't just necessary during the hard times, but as part of everyday care. We're sharing myths, truths, and options to help you support your child's well-being in ways that feel right for your family.

There's no one right answer, but there are many ways forward. And wherever you are on that journey, we're here to walk alongside you.



Jessica González

Director of Program Support Services
jgonzalez@ocbigs.org

To stay up on the latest news and updates for parents and guardians, visit ocbigs.org/parent-news



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: MYTH V.S. FACTS

When we think about mental health support, the first thing that often comes to mind is therapy. And while therapy can be an important resource, it's just one piece of a larger picture.

Mental health services include a wide range of support, such as mentors, school counselors, group programs, coping tools, and more. Even with more options available, it's still completely normal for families to have questions or hesitations.

In this section, we're taking a closer look at some of the most common beliefs we hear from parents and guardians and are offering a new perspective on what mental health support can look like for your child, family, and comfort level.



1

WHO NEEDS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES?

Myth: Mental health services are only for "serious" problems.

Fact: Support can benefit any child—whether they're going through a big change, feeling overwhelmed, or just need someone outside the family to talk to. It's not only for crises.

Myth: My child is too young to benefit from mental health services.

Fact: Even young children can benefit. Play-based and age-appropriate approaches help them express emotions and build tools to cope.

2

BARRIERS, FEARS, AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Myth: If I take my child to a mental health provider, they'll just be put on medication.

Fact: Medication is not the first step for most children. Many providers begin with therapy, coping strategies, or family-based support. Parents are involved every step of the way.

Myth: Talking about problems just makes them worse.

Fact: Avoiding emotions doesn't make them go away. Mental health support helps kids understand and manage what they're feeling in a healthy, safe way.

Myth: Mental health services are too expensive.

Fact: Many schools, clinics, and community organizations offer free or low-cost services. If your family has CalOptima or Medi-Cal, you may already be covered.

Myth: If I get my child help, people are going to know our business.

Fact: Support is confidential and focused on your child's well-being. It's not about exposing your family—it's about advocating for them.



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: MYTH V.S. FACTS

3

BUT WE ALREADY HAVE SUPPORT...

Myth: My child already has me, their mentor, or another trusted adult. They don't need anyone else.

Fact: Trusted adults are incredibly important—but sometimes youth need someone outside their circle. Mental health providers offer a neutral space where kids can talk without worrying about hurting anyone's feelings.

Myth: The only way my child can get mental health support is through therapy.

Fact: Therapy is one option, but support can also come from mentors, school counselors, group programs, or skill-building tools. What matters is finding what works best for your child.

4

HOW PARENTS FIT IN

Myth: If my child needs mental health support, I've failed as a parent.

Fact: Getting your child help is not a failure—it's a sign of strength, love, and commitment to their well-being.

Myth: I've never used mental health services, so I won't know how to help my child if they do.

Fact: You don't need past experience to support your child. Just showing up, asking questions, and being present sends the message that no one has to do this alone.

5

EXPECTATIONS AND THE PROCESS

Myth: If my child doesn't want to go to therapy, I can still force them to go.

Fact: In California, youth ages 12 and up can consent to—or decline—certain mental health services. Healing starts when a young person feels ready and safe. Support is most effective when it's built on trust and choice.

What You Can Do Instead:

- Open the conversation with curiosity and care
- Offer options, not pressure
- Share how you view mental health support, like you would physical health
- Let your child be part of the process
- Be patient—trust takes time

Myth: If my child goes to therapy, it should work right away.

Fact: Progress takes time. Just like it may have taken your child time to open up to their mentor, trust in mental health services builds slowly. Small shifts—like better sleep, fewer outbursts, or more openness—are signs it's working.

Myth: My child went to therapy before—there's no reason to go again.

Fact: Mental health isn't a one-time fix. Just like we return to a doctor when something new comes up, returning to mental health services at different times is normal and healthy.



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: MYTH V.S. FACTS

IF YOUR CHILD ISN'T READY FOR THERAPY—THERE ARE STILL OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT THEM

Every child is different, and sometimes, even when we know support is important, therapy might not feel like the right fit right now. That's okay—mental health services come in many forms, and there are simple, everyday ways to help your child feel seen, supported, and emotionally safe.

Here are some other meaningful ways to care for your child's mental wellness:



- **Talk it out at home:** Regular check-ins and open conversations help build trust. You don't have to have all the answers—just listening goes a long way.
- **Mentoring:** Your child already has a mentor through our program, and that relationship is a powerful source of support. If you're facing a barrier, such as language or communication challenges, your Program Specialist can help you connect more directly with your child's mentor.
- **Creative expression:** Art, journaling, music, and play can give kids and teens a safe outlet to process what they feel.
- **Movement and mindfulness:** Activities like walking, breathing exercises, or simply spending time outside can help regulate emotions.
- **Cultural or spiritual healing:** Traditions, rituals, and faith-based guidance can also bring comfort, belonging, and meaning.
- **Peer support:** Whether through a group or a trusted friend, feeling understood by others can make a big difference.

Remember, there's no single right way to support your child's mental health. What matters most is staying present, being open, and taking one step at a time.

CONNECT WITH BBBS FOR INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT, REFERRALS AND GUIDANCE

If you or your family are in need of mental health services, please reach out to your Match/ Program Specialist first to get connected with our trusted partners. The BBBS Program Support Services team is here to help you navigate the many options available in your area that best fit your family's needs.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US AT OUR ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT

In February, **more than 100 Bigs, Littles, and families** joined **our Mind & Money Matters Mental Health Summit** to talk about youth well-being. Through powerful conversations and interactive breakout sessions, we explored the often-overlooked link between financial stress and mental health.

Each group had its own learning space. Parents joined sessions on managing stress, challenging stigma, and creating emotionally supportive homes. Youth explored saving habits, the difference between needs and wants, and how financial stress can affect them (even when they're not the ones making money decisions). Mentors also had their own session focused on building confidence in discussing financial wellness and supporting their mentees through conversations that connect money to emotions, decision-making, and mental health.

This summit reminded us that when we include the whole circle of support, everyone walks away stronger. Whether you were able to attend or are curious about what's next, we look forward to creating more spaces where growth, healing, and connection can happen—together.



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE RECAP](#)

WHAT PARENTS ARE SAYING

92.5% of parents said they are very likely to use the tools and strategies learned at the Mental Health Summit to support their relationship with their child.

"It's my first time attending this meeting. I thought it was very nice, especially full of a lot of information that I didn't know."

"It's a good opportunity to deepen our knowledge in knowing that it's okay to ask for help."

FOOD DISTRIBUTION UPDATE

Since 2022, we've proudly served more than 1,100 families with fresh groceries and supplies through our partnership with the Clementine Food Trolley. **While this program has now come to an end**, our commitment to supporting families remains strong.

We are actively exploring new partnerships to bring food resources back in a way that is sustainable and meets the growing need of BBBS families. We'll share updates via text message as soon as possible. Please note that future distribution dates may differ from the usual schedule.

In the meantime, for help finding food programs in your area, please contact Marissa Gonzalez at (714) 707-2821. Thank you for your patience and support—we're excited about what's ahead!



FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAM PARENTS

Hello Parents and Guardians,

Thank you for being such a vital part of your child's mentorship journey. We know that raising children isn't easy—especially in today's world—but you are doing an amazing job! Your involvement and encouragement help them thrive in their match and in life.

If you have any questions or need additional support, please don't hesitate to reach out to your Match Support Specialist or contact me directly. Let's continue to build a future full of opportunity, growth, and connection—together.

Warmly,



Brianna Rios

Sr. Regional Director of Programs

brios@ocbigs.org



ATTENTION: PARENTS & GUARDIANS OF THE CLASS OF 2025



As your child prepares to graduate, you may be wondering what's next in their mentorship journey. **To continue in the program after graduation, both your child and their mentor must complete the Post-18 Opt-In Participation Forms**, which we'll be sending out soon. By opting in, your child and their mentor will continue receiving support from their Match Support Specialist, as well as access to BBBS-exclusive scholarships, college and career events, and more. We are proud to support youth through age 24 to help ease the transition into college and adulthood.



Reminder: BBBS Complete the Grad Survey. Help us celebrate your child's accomplishments! We'll be sending a brief survey to gather important information about this year's graduating class. Their input helps us recognize their achievements and improve our support.

MATCH EVENT SPOTLIGHT: SOCCER CLINIC



Match Events are no-cost activities hosted by BBBS staff and volunteers and are a great way to work on Littles' social skills. Ask your child's Big to sign them up to attend one of these upcoming match events!



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

Hello Parents and Guardians,

As the 2024-2025 school year comes to a close, our weekly High School Bigs program is beginning to wind down as well. We want to take a moment to **thank you** for being such an important part of this journey. It's been an incredible year filled with growth, connection, and unforgettable moments between our Bigs and Littles.

As May is Mental Health Awareness Month, we want to recognize the importance of caring for our minds—especially during times of transition. The end of the school year can bring excitement, but also stress, change, and big emotions for both youth and parents alike. This is a great time to check in with your child, reflect on their growth, and create space for open conversations about how they're feeling.

We encourage you to prioritize rest, create routines that support well-being, and take time to celebrate the wins, big and small. We've seen incredible resilience, kindness, and dedication from our youth this year, and that wouldn't be possible without your support.

Although site sessions will not be active this summer, please know that the High School Bigs team is still here for you. If you have any questions or need support over the break, don't hesitate to reach out—we're just an email, text message, or call away.

We can't wait to see what next year brings!

Your High School Bigs Team



HIGH SCHOOL BIGS SUMMER CELEBRATION

10 AM - 2 PM • Santa Ana Zoo

FREE ZOO ENTRY • PHOTO BOOTH • GAME TRUCK • & MORE!

LUNCH & TRANSPORTATION PROVIDED

Our annual Summer Celebration brings together Bigs and Littles for a day of fun at the Santa Ana Zoo. This event is a great opportunity for your student to create lasting memories and strengthen the bonds they formed throughout the year. As our site sessions will not be held during the summer, this is a unique opportunity for Littles to connect with their mentors before we resume in the fall.

To attend, your student must return a signed, physical copy of the permission slip—given to them by their Program Specialist—by the last day site day. Don't miss out!



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

As the school year comes to an end, so does another year of High School Bigs. So, **what's next for your child?**

FOR RETURNING LITTLES

If your child will be returning to the same elementary school in the fall, weekly High School Bigs site sessions will restart in Fall 2025. You do not need to submit a new application to participate in our program again next school year. If you plan to change schools next year, please contact your Program Specialist.

Your Program Specialist will be in touch in September-October to update you on your site start date and 2025-2026 schedule. Please note that Big Brothers Big Sisters is open all year round; please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or require community support or resources—we are here to help!

FOR PROMOTING LITTLES

If your child is promoting to middle school this fall, their High School Bigs match will be official closed in June, meaning your child will no longer be active in our program. Your Program Specialist will send you a closure letter for final communication from our agency.



IS YOUR KID HEADED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL?
Their mentorship journey doesn't have to end here!

Enroll your child in one of these Big Brothers Big Sisters programs and **help them realize their potential**. By giving them the opportunity to continue to be mentored, you can keep your Little on the path to a bright, promising future.

SPORTS BUDDIES

Connecting young people with a mentor through sports.

- >> **Mentor (Big):** Adult volunteer (18+)
- >> **Mentee (Little):** Youth (ages 11-14)
- >> **Structure:** Matches participate in 1 or 2 group activities per month facilitated by BBBS

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)

COMMUNITY-BASED

Big Brothers Big Sisters' traditional mentorship program!

- >> **Mentor (Big):** Adult volunteer (18+)
- >> **Mentee (Little):** Youth (ages 6-16)
- >> **Structure:** Matches schedule their own one-on-one outings in the community 2 times per month

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

LITTLE TESTIMONIALS

How has your Big prepared you for middle school?



"They are kind to me and have helped me with my homework."

- Evolet, 6th grade

What changes have you noticed in yourself since joining BBBS?



"Well I was more shy and quiet and I wouldn't talk much and now I am able to stand up for myself and I talk more."

- Natalia, 5th grade

How would you describe our program to someone who is interested in joining?



"I would say it is amazing, fun, energetic, joyful, enthusiastic, and makes me happy."

- Alondra, 6th grade



ACTIVITIES

Each week, your child and their Big will work on academics and participate in social-emotional learning activities, such as:

- **Flower Power** - This hands-on lesson invites matches to tap into their creativity through painting while exploring the importance of caring for our environment.
- **Big Bucks Store** - Students will soon be able to spend their "Big Bucks" they've earned for participation and attendance on rewards, celebrating their hard work and reinforcing their sense of accomplishment.
- **Summer Letters** - Bigs and Littles will write special letters to one another that we'll mail out over summer break. It's a meaningful way for matches to stay connected while they're apart and remember how much their time together matters.
- **End of Year Celebration** - At our final site day, we'll celebrate our seniors and promoting 6th graders with a pizza party and graduation ceremony.



PERSONAL SAFETY RULES

At BBBS, safety is our number one priority. Here are some of the site rules your child must follow:

- **Respectful Behavior:** Students are expected to show respect to their Bigs, peers, Program Specialist, and the material at all times.
- **No Exchange of Contact Info:** For the safety of all participants, students are strictly prohibited from exchanging personal contact info with their Big, such as phone numbers or social media profiles.
- Additionally, **meeting outside of the supervised mentoring sessions is NOT permitted.**



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Throughout the year, your child and their Big will work on a Youth Outcome Development Plan (YODP) to help achieve their goals. Our proven curriculum focuses on five key goals:

- Increasing confidence
- Future planning and exploration
- Building social skills
- Creating stronger relationships
- Learning self-regulation

FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

The High School Bigs Program is proud to partner with school districts across Orange County! Below is a list of our 2024-2025 school partners and the Program Specialists who facilitate these weekly after-school group mentoring sessions:

Ms. Dafne | ddeloera@ocbigs.org

- Pyles Elementary School - Monday
- Pacific Drive Elementary School - Tuesday
- Morse Elementary School - Wednesday
- Glenview Elementary School - Thursday

Ms. Jenny | jflores@ocbigs.org

- Hansen Elementary School - Monday
- Cerritos Elementary School - Tuesday
- Raymond Elementary School - Wed/Fri

Ms. Yvette | ylira@ocbigs.org

- Holder Elementary School - Wednesday
- Twila Reid Elementary School - Friday

Mrs. Maria | mherrera@ocbigs.org

- Tynes John Elementary School - Monday
- Melrose Elementary School - Tue/Fri
- Ruby Drive Elementary School - Thursday

Mr. Marcos | mcubias@ocbigs.org

- Olive Street Elementary School - Monday
- Franklin Elementary School - Tuesday
- Gauer Elementary School - Thursday
- Danbrook Elementary School - Friday

Ms. Mayra | mtorres@ocbigs.org

- Heideman Elementary School - Tuesday
- Westmont Elementary School - Wednesday
- Stoddard Elementary School - Thursday
- Ponderosa Elementary School - Friday

Ms. Jackie | javendano@ocbigs.org

- Victoria Elementary School - Monday
- Valencia Park Elementary School - Wednesday
- Beswick Elementary School - Thu/Fri

Ms. Sam | sschettini@ocbigs.org

- Maple Elementary School - Monday
- Topaz Elementary School - Tuesday

Ms. Stephanie | scastrejon@ocbigs.org

- Heninger Elementary School - Mon/Wed
- Esplanade Elementary School - Tuesday
- Davis Elementary School - Thursday

Ms. Vanessa | vmedina@ocbigs.org

- Wakeham Elementary School - Monday
- Sonora Elementary School - Tuesday
- Paularino Elementary School - Wednesday
- Bryant Elementary School - Thursday

Mr. Angel | aortega@ocbigs.org

- Diamond Elementary School - Mon/Thu

Please join us in welcoming Mr. Angel to our team! He brings great energy, dedication, and a strong commitment to supporting our students and families. We are excited to have him on board and look forward to the positive impact he will make this upcoming school year.

We look forward to continuing to grow these partnerships and creating a brighter future for students throughout Orange County!

FOR WORKPLACE MENTORING PARENTS

As we wrap up the school year, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks for being part of our Workplace Mentoring program. Three of our site partnerships—**Katella High School x Visit Anaheim, Tustin High School x Banc of California**, and **UCI Big Futures**—have officially come to a close. If your student participated in one of these cohorts, you should have already received confirmation that their match has formally ended with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

While these programs will not continue next school year, we are so grateful for the time your student spent with us and the growth we've seen in each of them. The only cohort continuing into the fall will be our **Loara High School x Disneyland Resort** program.

As BBBS Alumni, we encourage your student to stay connected with Big Brothers Big Sisters and explore other ways to stay involved. Please don't hesitate to reach out to your Program Specialist to learn more about additional mentoring opportunities and resources available to them.

Thank you again for your support and trust in our program!



Katie Esparza

Workplace Mentoring Program Manager

kesparza@ocbigs.org



PROGRAM REMINDER

We encourage mentees to stay in touch with their mentors! Consistent connection can offer valuable support during summer break. **Please note: in-person meetups are not permitted**, but matches are welcome to stay connected through text, phone, or Zoom. We also encourage you to check in with your child about their mentor communication—your support means a lot!

MENTORSHIP x MENTAL HEALTH

This quarter, students built confidence, communication skills, and resilience through sessions on Networking, Self-Advocacy, and Growth Mindset. These topics not only prepared them for the future, but also supported their mental health by creating a safe space to connect and grow. With guidance from their mentors, students strengthened emotional tools like stress management, self-advocacy, and confidence—skills that will serve them in the workplace and beyond.



"Applying for this program is the best thing I've done. Having my mentor as part of my journey has really expanded my connections, and it's been great to have someone to talk to and receive meaningful advice from."

— Loara High School Mentee



COMMUNITY RESOURCES & EVENTS



Mind in Motion at the Zoo

The 4th Annual Mental Health Resource Fair & Wellness Activities, hosted by Olive Crest Family Support Services, is bringing together community agencies, wellness activities, giveaways, and more. Families can explore movement zones, art activities, and receive helpful resources from trusted local organizations. Best of all—zoo admission is free for the first 500 attendees (no reservation required).

Date & Time: Saturday, May 17 | 11:30 AM - 2:00 PM

Location: Santa Ana Zoo

1801 E Chestnut Ave, Santa Ana, CA 92701

From Dinosaurs to People

Join the Heritage Museum of Orange County for a fun, family-friendly event that explores the rich history of Southern California from prehistoric times to today. Enjoy hands-on activities, local vendors, and cultural displays that celebrate the many communities that make up our region. This outdoor event is great for all ages and even welcomes pets!

Dates: Saturday, June 14, 2025, 10 AM – 3 PM

Location: Heritage Museum of Orange County

3101 W. Harvard St., Santa Ana, CA 92704



[Click here to learn more](#)



OC Parks Sunset Cinema Series

Enjoy a movie night under the stars with the OC Parks Sunset Cinema Series! Every Friday this summer, bring your blankets and snacks for a free outdoor movie experience the whole family can enjoy. Admission and parking are free.

Dates & Times: Fridays, June 6 – August 29

Gates open at 6 PM, movies start at sunset

[Click here to view full schedule](#)

Highlights include:

- Despicable Me 4 at Carbon Canyon (June 6)
- The Lion King (2024) at Mason Park (July 11)
- Twisters at Laguna Niguel (August 1)
- Moana 2 at Irvine Regional Park (August 29)



**Big Brothers
Big Sisters®**

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