



Tips for Volunteers: Mentoring Lesbian and Gay Youth



Lesbian and gay youth¹ are an invisible and often forgotten minority of Canadians. Along with the many other problems that adolescents must deal with, they often face profound feelings of social and emotional isolation that have been linked to increased rates of depression and suicide, substance abuse, and other self-damaging behaviors. As a Big Sister, you play an important role in demonstrating acceptance of your Little Sister as she is.

As a Big Sister:

- 1.** Be informed & examine your own biases. It is important to discuss any diversity concerns with a Big Sisters counsellor as soon as possible.
- 2.** Be supportive. Always follow your Little Sister's lead—if she brings it up and wants to talk about it, be there to listen.
- 3.** Do not assume that your Little Sister is heterosexual. You can't tell who is gay or lesbian by their appearance.
- 4.** Show acceptance by using inclusive language. For example, say “Are you interested in anyone?” instead of “Do you have a boyfriend?”.
- 5.** Don't be surprised if your Little Sister chooses to “come out” to you. You may be the person that she trusts the most.
- 6.** Maintain a balanced perspective. Sexual orientation is only part of what makes up your Little Sister's identity.
- 7.** Maintain confidentiality. If you “out” your Little (tell family or friends directly or indirectly that she is a lesbian or gay), you could put her at risk. If you ever feel unsure about her safety, contact a professional immediately.
- 8.** Seek support for yourself. This includes contacting your Big Sisters counsellor as well as other community resources as needed.
- 9.** Remember that you are a friend, and not a counsellor. If your Little Sister is struggling with issues of sexual identity and needs additional help beyond your support, encourage her to use resources that are available in the community.

¹ Note that the phrase “lesbian and gay youth” is used throughout—this phrase is used inclusively to refer to bisexual, queer, two-spirited and transgender youth as well.