



**Greater Boston Jewish Coalition for Literacy
Best Practices in Volunteer Program Engagement: Notes for Fall Training**

Designed from the learnings of the Match Life Cycle model of Big Brothers Big Sisters and feedback from Judi Locke, former school liaison for Stapleton Elementary/current volunteer.

Relationship Building Scenarios Activity

1. **Group Activity:** Volunteers will be in small groups.

2. **Role Play:**
 - a. Please act out what you would do in this situation with someone playing the student and someone playing the tutor. If necessary, please add others such as the teacher or school liaison.
 - b. Please rotate so that, if possible, each person in your group has an opportunity to serve in the tutor role.
 - c. **Debrief:** Debrief as a group the tutor's response and any challenges that arose. What particular actions or language did the tutor use that you would use? What would you do differently?

3. **Share:** Select a representative from your group to share with the larger group the most challenging moment in one of your role plays and/or an interesting response from the tutor that you would like to share with the larger group.

Connecting with Students

Engagement – On the first day, it is important to take time to build a relationship with your student(s). You can ask questions that help you understand the student's interests and skill level. Some sample questions include: what do you like to do in the afternoon or on weekends? What activities do you like (sports, arts, music, dance)? What is your favorite book? What would you say is a book you like but need help to read? This will help you identify good topics of discussion and additional reading materials you may want to use over and above those suggested or directed by the teacher. The teacher will also give you a good sense of the student's reading level. At first, your student may be shy or hesitant to open up. As they get to know you and the weeks go on, most will warm up.

Scenario: This is your second week of tutoring and your student Tasha is very quiet similar to how she was last week as well. You ask her what she would like to focus on today but she says she doesn't know. She also mentions that because it's the beginning of school there isn't much work or reading yet. How might you respond and begin the session?

Boundaries – As the relationship unfolds, you may find yourself sharing basic information about yourself (town where you live, profession, where you grew up). It is important to be mindful of what to share about personal life. For example, sharing the names and ages of your children may be a healthy choice while certain details about your day to day life or personal decisions should not be shared. Maintaining healthy boundaries and modeling best practices in sharing ensures that both you and your student feel comfortable with the level of trust between you. Therefore, you won't feel burdened by any personal circumstances that are too large for a GBJCL volunteer to advise. If something concerning does come up from your student, it is important that you inform the teacher so they can provide the student with support in the larger school context.

Scenario: You have been working with Joe for a number of months. He starts to share that he doesn't really have Christmas plans because of his family life – his father lost his job and his grandmother is sick. As a result, his father can get angry in front of Joe and often leaves Joe with his older sister. Joe says he hasn't really spoken to anyone at school about it because it just happened recently. How would you respond to Joe?

Closure – Saying goodbye and closure at the end of the school year is critical for both you and your student. When you reflect together on the successes the student achieved, you both will walk away with a sense of meaningful accomplishment. As you both say goodbye, you may find you want to leave your student with a closing gift for them to remember the experience. We ask that you take into consideration that not all students have tutors and not all tutors provide gifts so it is best to speak with your teacher, team leader or school liaison prior to doing so. If after consultation, a gift seems appropriate, a common gift is a book. A very fun alternative is to take a digital photo of the two of you, print it out in the computer lab and decorate the page with quotes from books you read, stories you liked and notes about your student's accomplishments. You can sign one another's copy and then encourage posting on the refrigerator or a bulletin board.

Scenario: As the year comes to a close, you are trying to explain to Nicole that you only have three sessions left together. As a result, Nicole starts asking you questions about what you do over the summer. You share about your plans to go to the Cape and Nicole begins asking questions such as "how does your family has the money for two houses?" How would you respond to Nicole?

Connecting with Teachers

Content – Teachers who are interested in receiving volunteer tutors for their classroom usually have a vision for how the tutoring fits into the curriculum. Teachers often outline the components of literacy (letter recognition, phonemes, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension) to focus on with your student. Students usually have classroom work or reading that they need to complete and are fortunate to have you as their partner in their work.

Scenario: You have been reading a chapter book with Emily for several weeks. You feel now that you know one another well, it is time to begin diving deeper into literacy skills such as comprehension and vocabulary. You emailed Emily's teacher for guidance on the level of comprehension to expect for Emily and received no response. You see the teacher in the hallway leading the students to art class as you enter the building 20 minutes early for tutoring. She is about to drop them off into the art room. What next steps would you take?

Approach – Every teacher has a different approach to giving direction to tutors. It is critical that tutors receive direction at the start of the year to inform their work and how to best support their student. Please check in with your teacher to determine the best method: email, phone, in-person post tutoring, handwritten note post tutoring. These check-ins are critical to ensuring growth and strong student support. If communication and support from the teacher poses a challenge and you are not able to make progress directly with the teacher, please contact the school liaison and/or team leader.

Scenario: You have met with Roger for a number of weeks and each week he wants to talk about the Patriots. Every time you try to direct him to the worksheets he has for homework, he comes up with an excuse not to begin and leaves for an extended period of time – he forgot his Student ID in his locker and needs it for lunch right after tutoring, he has to go to the bathroom, he forgot to ask his teacher a question etc. You see the teacher in the classroom after the session. The students are working in small groups. The teacher is answering a student's question individually at the front of the room. You see them wrap up at 10:58am and there is a schedule on the board that indicates math lesson begins at 11am. How would you respond to the situation?

Feedback – At times, teachers may open up to tutors and confide in them about situations in the classroom, in the school or amongst the administration. Volunteers at times support their classroom teacher by serving as a listening board. In addition to maintaining confidentiality, it is important to consider your role in the school. As a member of the GBJCL volunteer community, your voice represents more than only your own opinion within the school setting and school community. To school staff, volunteers represent their synagogue or organization participating in the school partnership. If issues arise that merit feedback, please consult with your team leader for guidance on next steps.

Scenario: You and your student's teacher have a great relationship and she always takes three minutes to check in after tutoring. Last week, the teacher began sharing how disgruntled the teachers are about the new leadership because they are changing the daily schedule and reassigning teachers to different grade levels than they were in before. You are concerned about the teacher's morale and care so much about the school. What could you do?