

5 Ways to Nurture a Charitable Child

Surprising steps that will start your youngster on a lifetime of giving

by Hillary Quinn

Two summers ago, my then-6-year-old son, Adam, told me he wanted to run a lemonade stand. I agreed—though without much enthusiasm, as I envisioned dragging sticky cups and loose change down the driveway. But then Adam told me that he wanted “to make money to help Grandma get better.” Grandma, you see, was battling leukemia. And as I watched my son selling the “Lemon Aid” at 25 cents a cup (raking in \$10.61; don’t bother doing the math), my heart melted. The next day, Adam and I wrote a check to the Leukemia Society.

“The secret to raising a child who gives of himself, not because he wants a pat on the back but because it’s the right thing to do, is to teach empathy,” says Michele Borba, Ed.D., author of *Building Moral Intelligence*. “Kids are born with this potential—but they need help to make it blossom.”

Since September’s terrorist tragedy, Americans—kids as well as adults—have been more motivated than ever to make a positive difference in others’ lives. A 9-year-old in Florida collected teddy bears for children who’d lost a parent; an 11-year-old climber raised relief funds by tackling a difficult rock face in Yosemite National Park; four girls ran a car wash fund-raiser that collected \$10,000.

Want to grow a giver, a child who answers the call to action every day? Read on for a step-by-step guide.

1 Chat about charity.

Whether December or June, it’s always the season to give. Talk regularly with your kids, telling them that generosity is a part of your family’s values. Avoid using language that separates “us” from “them,” advises Deborah



Spaide, author of *Teaching Your Kids to Care*. And your effort doesn’t have to be global. Keep it small and close to home by saying, “Do you remember when someone helped you? Sometimes we all need assistance. Our neighbor, Susan, has been sick for a week now. What do you think she might need to make her feel better?” If a real-life example isn’t at hand, use situations on TV or in books to make your point. “Take note of role models when you see them in the news,” adds Dennis Lowe, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Family at Pepperdine University. “Be specific. Point out a story about a person who donated bone marrow, for example, and explain to your child why it helped.” And talk about people you know: “We really admire John because, as a doctor, he helps people who can’t afford to pay for his services.”

2 Off-load your extras.

It’s not enough just to talk about giving. One way to put words into action is by sharing what you have in surplus. Encourage your kid to donate a few playthings to less fortunate children. But don’t force her to give up anything cherished, as it will only breed resentment (any parent who has attempted to separate her child from a headless Power Ranger—or those plastic birthday party favors that seem to multiply in the closet—knows this). Instead, provide a cardboard box, allow her to fill it, and drop it off to-

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child behavior

Try Kids Care Clubs (www.kidscare.org), a national organization that can turn a gaggle of children into a philanthropic force. For \$25, you can become a member and start a club in your area. You'll receive start-up materials, including suggestions for projects like growing a community garden or running a bake sale; an e-newsletter; and emergency alerts when disasters strike, along with ideas on how kids can help. After the September 11 tragedy, for example, the site mobilized children to roll spare pennies to donate to the relief effort. (You'll need a backer, too: Each club must be sponsored by a local school, house of worship, or youth organization.)

4 Click on caring.

Spend some time scanning the Charities page at www.amazon.com/charities to donate books or other requested items to a needy organization, such as Habitat for Humanity. Read the list of groups to your child, explain what each one does, and let him choose. Or purchase goods from more than 300 vendors through www.schoolpop.com, which donates from five to 20 percent of the proceeds to the school of your choice. Gap, Banana Republic, and Old Navy stores (all owned

gether at a hospital or shelter. The personal connection reinforces generosity. Toys can also be donated to Goodwill, which resells them along with other goods at low prices. Call 800-664-6577 or check www.goodwill.org.

Remember that the more often your kid gives stuff away, the better (and not just because it frees up storage space). "Take a three-pronged approach to charity: Your child should understand why he needs to help, he should feel good about it, and he should be able to take practical actions," explains Borba. "The doing part is key, and it must be practiced."

3 Jump-start giving as a group.

One way to encourage charity—and to train your child to keep it up—is to make it enjoyable. "Helping can be even more fun if a youngster finds an activity to do with one or two of her best friends," says Borba. "Parents should help kids age seven or eight to branch out and assist schoolmates and people in the neighborhood." And by age 10, youngsters are ready to volunteer through community organizations. The key to success is to match their natural interests with a service project. For example, a kid who loves the outdoors may want to clean up litter in the park, while a shy child may prefer to send cards to relief workers and soldiers.

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by Gap, Inc.) also regularly donate to worthy organizations. If your child is working with a charity, go to www.gapinc.com for info on corporate sponsorship.

Other, nonretail sites are blossoming as well: Family Cares, at www.familycares.org, and the Points of Light Foundation, at www.pointsoflight.org, offer opportunities for families to do charitable work together through a state-by-state listing of volunteer centers. And visit www.helping.org and www.citycares.org for more ideas.

5 Walk the talk.

Mailing a check to a worthy organization is one step, but it's important to show your child that you give of yourself, too, whether by taking her along when you give blood or packing groceries together at a food bank. That's what Laurie Raphael learned the year she and her husband spent Thanksgiving Day working with their 10-year-old twins at a soup kitchen in Danbury, Connecticut. "My husband, Keith, surprised me—he sat with the homeless and talked to them," explains Raphael. "And that's when it hit me: The connection he was making with the people is what mattered most. Before I knew it, my kids, Remy and Cody, joined the conversations." And explain your behavior, adds Lowe. Say, "We're helping out because these people are going through a

child behavior

tough time right now, and we can make it better."

At the same time, don't push your child if she doesn't seem ready. "Avoid situations that may scare your kid if she's not prepared for them, such as a visit to a hospice where people are very ill," says Dan Kindlon, Ph.D., author of *Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age*. Rather, choose a task that is age-appropriate and tangible, like collecting blankets together for a homeless shelter or starting a recycling drive. "These hands-on activities provide kids with a sense of accomplishment," Kindlon says, "and that means your youngster will be more likely to make contributions in the future." ❄

Hillary Quinn, a mother of two, lives in Seattle. She writes often on family issues.

WHAT'S THE MOST CHARITABLE THING YOUR CHILD HAS EVER DONE?

We'd really love to hear from you! Write FAMILY LIFE, 530 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036; fax 212-467-1248; or e-mail familylife_letters@timeinc.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number.

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