

teach your kids the gift of giving

Helping others arms your children with rewards and skills that will last long after the holiday hubbub has faded. Here's how.

by Hillary Quinn



Of course kids love getting presents at the holidays, but what truly makes the season special is the genuine sense of goodwill all around them. That's why now is the best time to show a child how to spread that warmth by helping others. Yes, it's great for the needy, but it's even better for your kid. Children love being helpful (it makes them feel grown-up), and volunteering "gives them the chance to experience the deeply rewarding payoff that comes from making someone else happy," says Deborah Spaide, author of *Teaching Your Kids to Care*. Read on to learn all the ways that volunteering boosts your child's self-image, plus strategies for keeping him motivated and projects he can dive into right now.

WHEN YOUR CHILD GIVES, HE GETS...

- **Courage to initiate change.** When a child improves someone else's life, he sees that he can change the world around him—and even himself—for the better, says Cathryn Berger Kaye, author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*. For 6-year-old Cleo Payne of Pelham, NY, volunteering at her local park has shown her the big impact of a small gesture. "A park is nice and relaxing, but if it's all messed up, no one wants to come there," she says. "I like burying the bulbs so there can be flowers again."
- **Compassion for all beings.** Helping people in need lets kids flex their caring instincts. Same goes for working with animals. "The kindness, understanding, and patience that kids learn in caring for pets segues to gentleness with peers," says Charlotte Le-Frank, program coordinator at the Child Abuse Prevention Council in Windsor, Ontario. Danny Gottfried, 12, of North Andover, MA, recently

spread the kindness message at his "ASPCA birthday party" by asking friends to bring toys for the animals at a local shelter rather than gifts for him. "The animals were so bored, and I have a whole room of things to play with," says Danny, who has two cats adopted from his local ASPCA.

● **Enthusiasm for teamwork.** Working with others toward a common goal shows kids that sharing responsibility can have a bigger impact than going it alone. Take 7-year-old Natalie Antupit of Seattle. To aid tsunami victims, she spearheaded a fund-raising bake sale at her school. "I liked working with my friends, and it was easier with people helping," she says. "It made me feel really good to help people I didn't know."

● **Powerful pride.** Volunteering is a win-win experience for kids: Every little bit they do helps, and that, in turn, is a great self-esteem booster. "Realizing they did something to make someone else smile is priceless," says Spaide. "You can't match that feeling." ►

HOW TO PLANT THE "GIVING" SEED

It's never too early to expose your child to philanthropic activities, says Kathy Saulitis, director of youth and family outreach at the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network, a group that promotes volunteering. To motivate them to give back, follow these expert tips.

- **START SMALL.** Teach your toddler about generosity by encouraging her to share her toys, rewarding her for helping around the house, or showing her how to give a loving hug to someone who is crying or hurt.
- **PRAISE KINDNESS.** When your child does something nice for someone, compliment him. Say, "Thank you for helping Mommy pick up those clothes" or "It's so nice of you to share your book with Timmy."
- **SET AN EXAMPLE.** Let your kids see you doing generous acts—even helping an elderly person grab something from a high grocery shelf will make an impression. "If parents do it, children will do it," says Saulitis.
- **TALK ABOUT REACHING OUT.** Slip a newspaper article about a family in need under your child's plate and discuss it over dinner, or direct her attention to causes that spring from the news. "We have talked a lot as a family about Hurricane Katrina—imagining what it would be like to lose your home, school, even friends," says Kelly Collison, 46, of Cincinnati. "As a result, my 10-year-old son, Quinn, started selling milk shakes and lemonade door-to-door to raise money for the Red Cross."
- **GET THEIR INPUT.** By asking your child for her ideas (i.e., "Our neighbor, Mr. Andrews, is sick. What should we do?"), you're saying that her opinions count. "This makes a kid feel valued, which empowers and motivates her," says Saulitis.
- **REMEMBER THE END GOAL.** Showing kids the full circle of their volunteer work makes them want to do more. After your child has collected canned food for the homeless, take her with you to drop it off at the shelter or church so she can see firsthand the results of her work.
- **APPEAL TO THEIR INTERESTS.** Encourage your child to choose an activity that he's passionate about. "Kids love to show what they're good at," explains Saulitis. "And the more you draw on their abilities, the more motivated they become." (See "Ideas for Your Child to Try?" for tips.)

YOU TELL US:

“how my kids give back”

"My family collects used clothing, bedding, and garage-sale leftovers from friends and family, and gives them to the homeless under a local bridge as part of a project called Friday Night Feed. My kids love the look on the parents' faces when they find something perfect for their family."

Robbyn Richter, 40, mom to Ashlie, 15, and Travis, 11
Bonney Lake, WA

"Along with other neighborhood children, my kids put together a lemonade stand to help Hurricane Katrina survivors. They only raised about \$10, but the fact that my kids would do that—they're only 7 and 6—made me very proud. With the money, we bought three cases of water and

donated them. My kids still continually ask me, 'What else can we do to help?'"

Joanna Bailey, 31, mom to Emily, 7, Paxtyn, 6, and Joseph, 4
Kokomo, IN

"Every Christmas, our kids ask for a financial donation to a charity of their choice in lieu of one of their gifts from Mom and Dad. They love researching their charity online and getting updates from the organization throughout the year."

Barbara Noriko Jabba, 41, mom to Katherine, 8, Claire, 7, and Corinne, 4
Redwood City, CA

"We clean a two-mile section of road near our home each spring. My kids have discovered that it's not only material things that make you happy, but also spending time with your family."

Carol Reimann, 37, mom to Derrick, 6, and Micah, 5
Shepherd, MT

ideas for your child to try

Children who love animals can...

- Bake dog biscuits or cat treats and deliver them to a local animal shelter. Or visit the animals to give them much-needed love. (Go to aspca.org to find a shelter near you.)
- Walk or bathe the pet of an elderly or sick neighbor.
- Choose a cow or another animal to buy for a family in a developing country through Heifer International (heifer.org).

Children who love being around younger kids can...

- Teach a young neighbor to ride a bike, tie his shoelaces, or tell time.
- Collect money from family members and take a deserving child to lunch and a holiday play. (Ask your local church for suggestions for whom to take.)
- Tutor younger kids after school.

Children who love nature can...

- Organize a litter patrol for the schoolyard or neighborhood playground.
- Help plant flowers at a local park.
- Cut and arrange fresh flowers and deliver them to patients at a local hospital.

Children who love the arts can...

- Make holiday greeting cards and give them to the elderly at a senior center.
- Offer to do gift-wrapping for an elderly neighbor or an overstressed new mom.
- Help paint a hospital, shelter, or community-center mural. (Go to artistshelpingchildren.org for local projects.)

Children who love to read can...

- Lead storytimes at libraries and shelters.
- Collect books and magazines from neighbors and deliver them to shelters, day-care centers, and hospitals.
- Read to elderly nursing-home residents who have vision problems.

Children who love interacting with people can...

- Visit a convalescent home and take wheelchair-bound patients for walks.
- Go to a homeless shelter and play with the kids who live there.
- Put together simple bag lunches and distribute them to the homeless.
- Organize a canned-food drive at school and prepare and serve the food to the homeless at a local church or shelter.