

Parenting Together

Becoming Great Helpers

During the holidays, opportunities are everywhere to help children understand why and how to help people. There are food drives, toy drives, clothing drives, giving trees, soup kitchens, and more.

And, there is evidence that children are receptive to these messages of helping. Research suggests that they have a deeply rooted instinct to share and to help others, from the time they are very young. One study even found toddlers enjoy giving to others more than they like getting treats or gifts for themselves. Children seem to have a strong, natural drive to be kind and generous.



So how can we make sure that giving feels good for kids and launches this “positive cycle” of happiness and generosity? Below are 9 examples of how you can help your child(ren) learn to understand empathy and develop the habit of helping others.

1. Use the word “help” with your children often

Look for opportunities to make your child feel valued for being a helper and helping you or someone else, even in small ways. Reinforce the deed your child does by building his or her self-esteem and making helping into a habit.

2. Encourage your children to describe how they helped someone else

You can make this even more fun by asking them to draw a picture of themselves doing something to help another person. Then, have a conversation about it and encourage your child to describe the story in the picture that they drew.

3. Show your child how to have the courage to help others

Explain that sometimes you have to do the things you’re afraid of in order to help others. As long as it is safe, it can be important to be brave and help another person.

“I think helping our kids experience the happiness that comes from giving to others is probably one of the most valuable ways we can nurture generosity in them. It sets off this positive cycle: Giving makes people happy and happiness promotes giving.”

-Lara Aknin, PhD

Assistant Professor,
Simon Fraser University

4. Help someone in need

Children who volunteer to help kids in need show other kids that they have the capacity to make other people's lives better, which reinforces that things can always get better, be happier, and more positive. Especially if we are willing to help each other.

5. Save small change to make a donation

Empower your child to save some small change or items to donate to a good cause. This teaches the importance of helping others and also shows your child that there are people and organizations out there that are always there to help if they (or your family) ever needed it. It also demonstrates to your child how donations really do make a difference.

6. Think about fun projects to show gratitude to others

For example, bake cookies for local firefighters. Deliver the cookies with a note from your child that says, "Thank you for your willingness to keep us safe." Explain to your child how firefighters help others both in big and small ways. With your child, deliver cards or homemade gifts to friends, family members, and neighbors.

7. Label your child's feelings

Discuss feelings with your child and label different feelings that they have. This will help your child recognize empathy quicker and respond faster to others in an empathetic way.

8. Be a role model for your child

This one is SO important! Show your child what you can do for a person who you are feeling empathy for. Engage your child, if possible, in participating in the action of helping or the act of kindness.

9. Provide opportunities for your child to practice empathy.

Bring the action of helping others into your child's life by intentionally looking for situations in which your child can lend a helping hand. Make it a daily practice and soon it will become a life long habit!

The Book Nook

Bear Says Thanks
by Karma Wilson

El ratón y la pelota roja
by Petr Horáek

Last Stop on Market Street
by Matt de la Peña

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References

25 Ways to Teach Your Child the Spirit of Giving

<https://www.onetoughjob.org/blog/2015/06/25-ways-to-teach-your-child-the-spirit-of-giving>

How to Help Kids Learn to Love Giving

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_help_kids_learn_to_love_giving

Helping Others

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/helping-others/>