

Teaching Adolescents the Joy of Serving Others

Our children are growing up in a world where “wants” and “achievements” can be overpowering forces that leave them without a sense of gratitude for what they have or empathy for the needs of others. Volunteering can be a way to overcome those forces. Research shows that most students who volunteer, say that it makes them feel good about themselves because it leads to feeling like they made a difference, made them feel needed, left them feeling happier and less stressed.

Contributing feels good. When we share a part of ourselves with others, it can improve our self-esteem and confidence. When we give our time, talents or money, we learn to appreciate what we have. The same applies for our children. Individuals who recognize that they have the ability and power to influence their world are more likely to get involved. This sense of purpose can motivate and empower adolescents to take actions and make choices that improve the world as well as enhance their own competence, character and sense of connection to their community. Contribution is an important component in building resilience and parents can help their adolescents to develop and strengthen that skill.

Since most middle school students report that they first volunteer because they were encouraged by school personnel or parents, we need to be prepared to enlighten them about the benefits of volunteering. It’s important to find volunteer opportunities that fit the skills and interests of each individual child. Volunteering doesn’t need to be complicated or organized. Sometimes it’s as simple as matching your child’s skills, strengths or interests with the needs of someone in your own family or community. Does your child love working in the outdoors? Perhaps helping an older neighbor with gardening or lawn care is an option. Does your child love to talk...and talk...and talk? Maybe some time with a friend or family member who is unable to get out of the house. Is your child great with technology? Maybe take time to teach a younger (or older) family member how to navigate their devices. Here are just a few of the many benefits of volunteering:

- ◇ Volunteering offers a sense of personal achievement. When our kids volunteer, they are able to see tangible results of their efforts and begin to recognize they can make a difference in the world.
- ◇ Volunteering *with* our children provides an opportunity to bond, build mutual respect and allows us to engage in deeper conversation about real-world issues.
- ◇ Volunteering cultivates a better understanding of world issues like homelessness, hunger and poverty.
- ◇ Volunteering enhances long-term prospects. Young people who volunteer are able to make connections and learn about how they might use the talents in future jobs.

Prevention Principle

Research indicates that students who participate in service learning (volunteering) are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Service learning has a positive effect on students’ interpersonal development and prosocial bonding.

Conversations that Count

Knowing that you’ve done something worthwhile or helped another person is a great feeling. These emotions are especially important for a child going through the transitional stage of middle school, when some students struggle to find their own identity. Use this month’s PowerTalk—[Family Volunteer Project](#) to help your family begin to talk about places you might want to volunteer.



5 REASONS to Volunteer

- 1 Volunteering connects you to others
- 2 Volunteering increases self confidence
- 3 Volunteering strengthens your community
- 4 Volunteering is good for your mind and body
- 5 Volunteering makes a difference

Find volunteer opportunities at 



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