

Did You Know?

Encouraging Acts of Kindness and Gifts of Service

One of the important skills that preschoolers need to learn is how to be social and how to be in relationship with others. They start learning this through those life experiences that teach them "it's not just about *me*." Preschool is the perfect age to start talking about the importance of helping other people. We are trying to teach this through our small group activities at school. Many parents are also looking for ways to nurture generosity at home and to engage young children in giving service.

Children Learn from Us

Acts of service and genuine acts of kindness are powerful lessons to teach young children at this time of year. Children look to *our* examples of generosity, compassion, and selflessness more than ever during the holiday season.

Cultivate Generosity in Your Family

Children want to help select gifts and be able to "give service" in their own special way. Get your child excited about giving.

- Periodically give your child a box and ask her/him to fill it with toys or books s/he no longer wants. Explain that they will be given to children who can't easily get their own.
- Bring your child with you to drop the box at a community service organization or library to help your child feel connected to those on the receiving end of their generosity.
- Help your child surprise someone at home with breakfast in bed.
- Have your child help you prepare and bring food to people in need.
- Engage your preschooler in the making of a small homemade gift. Framing a drawing, coloring an ornament, or baking cookies personalizes the act even more for your child--and for one who receives it.
- Encourage your child to secretly place a flower in your neighbor's newspaper one morning.
- Work with your child to make a birdfeeder from a plastic dish and put it in your yard or on the windowsill. Keep it filled with seed or water.
- Take your child to give a "just because" flower or plant to an elder, with a heartfelt "have a nice day."
- Have your child help you leave a treat/handmade drawing with a note of thanks for your mail carrier.
- Encourage your child to deliver a hand-made card to your neighbor.
- Start a Family Kindness Journal (kind acts given & received) or make a good deeds "Kindness Tree."
- Have each member of your family choose someone outside the family who has made a positive difference in their lives. Write short thank-you notes (or make drawings) and mail the letters together.



TALK ABOUT GIVING GIFTS THIS MONTH

"What is a gift?"

Most children associate gift-giving with store purchases. A gift can also be a service, like helping someone else or doing an act of kindness.

Talk about our HOLIDAY DONATION BOXES and bringing a toy or can of food for children and families who have less than we do.

Emphasize that doing something *kind* for someone is also a gift. We give something of ourselves to others when we wash their hands, give them a back-rub, help them clean up, give them a hug, or give them one of our paintings.

Make a GIVING BOWL



Have your family brainstorm good deeds everyone could do to help around the house or to help others. Keep it simple! (Ex.: Take out the trash, wash a window, pick up litter, "read" to a younger sibling, etc.)

Write down the ideas on small pieces of paper. Place them in a pretty bowl where everyone will have easy access to it. Encourage your family to choose good deeds out of the bowl and complete them.

When all the good deeds are accomplished, celebrate with ice cream or do something together that you enjoy as a family.

Make a Kindness Chain


Think of as many small acts of kindness as you can for the age of your children. Write them each on a strip of colored paper. Here are some ideas:



- Give brother a hug.
- Give mommy a kiss.
- Smile at someone today.
- Pick up your toys.
- Say, "Good Morning!" to someone.
- Sing a happy song.
- Do a puzzle with ___.
- Set the table.
- Help Daddy do ___.
- Help Mommy by ___.
- Call Grandma and say "I love you."
- Draw a picture and mail it to Grandpa.

Make the strips into rings and string the chain in your home. Encourage your child(ren) to tear off one ring each day and try the act of kindness.

'Do A Good Deed' Advent Calendar

1		3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25			



Teach your children about value of giving (rather than just receiving) during the holiday season by using this family tradition from Marilyn Drino. Make or search for an advent calendar that has pockets on each of the 25 days before Christmas. (You could even make one by adding pockets to an existing calendar.) Tell your children that when they do one good deed or one act of helpfulness each day, you will put a coin in the pocket of their advent calendar. At the end of advent, work with them to empty all the pockets and count the money they have earned. Then take them to the store and allow them to buy (with their "good deeds money") a gift for a needy child.

HELPING OTHERS

What Else Can YOU Do?

We don't realize how incredibly influential we are as parents. If we are generous ourselves, it helps our children remember that they can be generous as well. We teach kindness throughout the year by our actions. When we make an extra effort to put in time to be of service in our community, whether volunteering to help a stranger or just brightening a neighbor's day, it is an extension of our routine thoughtfulness.



In order for generosity to become second-nature to our children later in their lives, we need to teach our children when they are young. Here are some ideas from *helpothers.org* that might move you to action. Model any one of these and your child will follow. Create a "blueprint for service" in your child's heart today that will last a lifetime.

GIFTS FROM THE HEART

Gift of Affection: be generous with hugs, kisses, and pats on the back.

Gift of Laughter: clip cartoons, share funny stories.

Gift of a Written Note: send a 'thank you' note, write a letter to an old friend.

Gift of a Compliment: a simple 'you look great today', a sincere 'thank you for a wonderful meal'.

Gift of Listening: no interrupting, no daydreaming, no responding, just listening.

Gift of Service: donate to a cause, as a holiday gift for your best friend.

Gift of Solitude: spend some time in silence, help others spend some time in silence.

ACTS OF ANONYMOUS KINDNESS

- Leave a bouquet of flowers on a neighbor's front step.
- Smile at a stranger. Hold open the door. Be a courteous driver.
- Slip a \$20 (or whatever you can afford) bill to a person who you know is having financial difficulty.
- Select some people in your life who you feel need a special lift and send them a gift: flowers, tickets to a special event, or a gift certificate.
- Leave enough money in the vending machine for the next person to get a free treat.
- Pay the toll for the person behind you.
- Write something nice about your waitperson on the back of the bill.
- Always say "please," "thank you," and "you're welcome" with a smile; you'll get it back!
- Get to work before others and leave a piece of candy, brownie, fruit, flower, etc. at every desk.
- Defend others. Speak up when you hear someone use a racist remark.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Five Bucks and Under

What can you do with five bucks to make someone's day? Tape the exact change for a soda to a vending machine or a payphone. Babysit for free for a mom who needs a day to herself. Leave flowers in front of someone's house. Bake cookies for your neighbors. Send cards with beautiful messages to anonymous people. Treat someone to a cup of their favorite coffee.

Give to the Ones Closest to You

Surprise your family with an act of kindness. Leave a note under your child's pillow. Give your partner a hug in the morning, for no reason. Help your mother, brother, or sibling with something that they would

not expect you to do. Leave flowers in your child's bedroom. Spend some time with your grandparents. Make breakfast for your partner. Call your parents just to say 'Hello'. Leave a handwritten 'I Love You' note where your spouse might unexpectedly find it. Read to your child and be fully present.

Practice Kindness to the Environment.

Give houseplants as gifts to teachers, friends, or coworkers. Plant a tree in your neighborhood. Pick up trash with your child at the playground. Participate in a beach cleanup. Cut down on the energy you use.

Honor Your Personal Heroes

Dedicate a small act of kindness to a personal "hero" in your life by writing them a letter about your experience. Tell the story of your hero to your young child. Find your favorite elementary school teacher and send him/her some 'thank-you' flowers anonymously. Get a 'just because' gift for your dad even when it isn't Father's Day. At your next family gathering, have everyone share each other's hero stories.

Lend an Ear

Sometimes kindness is as simple as listening. Lend an ear to someone going through a tough time. Next time you ask someone, 'How are you?' listen fully to the response. Actively listen to your friends without judging. Listen to the stories of a senior who doesn't get any visitors. Spend some time in silence, listen to your heart and follow it.

Reach Out to the Homebound.

Extend yourself to seniors, those who are ill, or caregivers committed to caring for their family members at home. Email them regularly. Send an inspiring book. Offer to bring them books from the library. Send them a subscription to your favorite magazine. Help them care for their pets. Convince a beautician or barber to make a house-call. Buy them nice stationary so they write notes to those they are grateful for.

Express kindness to those who are healing.

Leave a stuffed animal for a child in a hospital. Drive a friend to medical treatments. Plant a tree to commemorate someone coming out of a long illness. Run a race to help fund research for a fatal disease.

Give Thanks

Email a friend to thank them for being there for you through hardships. Send an e-card to your husband or wife to tell them how much you appreciate having them in your life. Call your grandparents and tell them what they've meant to you. Tell your child how much you love her—just *because!*

Help the Homeless

Take warm clothes, blankets or food to a homeless person that you often cross paths with. Donate your professional clothes to an organization that helps people get back into the workforce. Give gently worn home furnishings or household appliances to a person or family who might need them or donate them to an organization. Donate toys and books to a homeless organization. Toys and books are just as important to kids as food and shelter. When shopping, buy a couple of extra non-perishable food items and take them to a food drive or pantry. Make an extra serving of dinner and bring it to a homeless person in your neighborhood.

Create Beauty

Create beauty, in the spirit of kindness. Make something of beauty and gift it selflessly to the first person who appreciates it. Be bold in your appreciation of life around you!

Gift of Inner Transformation

Restrain from criticizing or saying anything negative to anyone this week. In a challenging situation, dare to see the glass half full, rather than half empty. Listen more than you speak. Give freely of yourself. Practice kindness at every opportunity you get.



