

Parenting Tip of the Month

December



Lower Elementary Teachers

10 Ways to Raise a Charitable Kid

You know charity starts at home. Here's how to cultivate a giving spirit in your children.



Samantha is not yet 4 years old, but she already has the makings of a charitable child. She was distributing school supplies with her family to kids at a homeless shelter, where I was volunteering, and noticed one child in a corner didn't have a backpack. She picked up a spare, walked to him and said, "I sorry you don't have one. I hope you happy."

The preschooler may have missed a few words, but her message displayed empathy and a charitable spirit – all because her parents were raising her to care about others.

Kids benefit in many ways from learning to be generous and caring about others. Researchers have found that empathy is the cornerstone for becoming a happy, well-adjusted, successful adult. Studies show that possessing empathy also makes children more likable, more employable, better leaders, more conscience-driven and even increases their lifespan.

The best news is that empathy can be cultivated, and one of the best empathy generators are service projects to help kids step out of their comfort zones, open their eyes and expose them to others' lives. Here are 10 simple, science-backed tips adapted from my book, "UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed In Our All-About-Me World," to inspire generosity in your children 365 days a year:

1. Prioritize caring. A report by Harvard University's Making Caring Common Project found that most teens value academic achievement and individual happiness over caring for others. Their reason for this? Kids believed that's what adults value. Prioritize charitableness in your family chats. Be clear that you expect your children not only to do their academic best, but to care about others. Display photos of your kids engaged in thoughtful endeavors, rather than just showcasing their school successes, athletic prowess or having them look cute for the camera.

2. Be a charitable role model. The old saying, "Children learn what they live," has a lot of truth to it. Studies show that if parents are generous and giving, kids are likely to adopt those qualities. So show your child the joy you get by giving. There are so many daily opportunities: phoning a friend who is down, collecting blankets for the homeless, volunteering at a food bank. After volunteering, be sure to tell your child how good it made you feel.

3. Make it a family routine. A simple way to inspire children's generosity is by reinforcing it. Keep a box by your backdoor to encourage family members to donate their gently used toys, games or books. Then each time the box is filled, deliver the items as a family to a shelter or needy family. Make charity a routine ritual that becomes a cherished childhood memory.

4. Acknowledge charitableness. Whenever your child acts in a kind-hearted way, say so: Thank them for being kind or helping out. Also, let your kids overhear (without them thinking they're supposed to) you describing their caring qualities to others.

5. Use real events. Instead of just bemoaning bad news, talk about how you might help in the local community. It could be donating items to help after a publicized fire, or thinking about ways to assist the most vulnerable – like the homeless – during the winter. You can start at home, too, such as teaching them to be there for a family member who is going through a hard time.

6. Start a “giving plan.” Encourage your children to give a portion of their allowance – or tooth fairy money – to a charity of their choice. Provide three small plastic containers for younger kids or envelopes for teens that are labeled: “save,” “spend” and “give.” Then help them decide which percentage of their money is to be allocated to each container.

7. Find your child’s passion. Kids are more likely to want to get involved in service projects that match their interests. Help your kids choose something they’re good at and enjoy doing. If he loves reading, read to the blind; enjoys writing, be a pen pal to an overseas orphan; likes sports, volunteer for the Special Olympics; is musical, play at a homeless shelter; enjoys knitting, knit a beanie for a soldier. You get the idea.

8. Make charity a family affair – or share the experience with friends. Find a service to do together, like serving in a soup kitchen. If your child enjoys volunteering with friends, ask if she’d like to do her project with someone. Or your child can form a club with neighbors, classmates, members of their scout troop or a church group.

9. Recap their impact. Research has found that children who are given the opportunity to help others tend to become more helpful, especially if the impact of their actions is pointed out. So encourage your child to reflect on her volunteering experiences: “What did the person do when you helped? How do you think he felt? How did you feel? Is lending a hand easier than it used to be?” Remind your kids that their caring efforts are making a difference.

10. Keep giving. A once-a-year day of volunteering is rarely enough for a child to adopt a charitable mindset. Look for ways to help your children experience the joy of giving on a regular basis: baking an extra batch of cookies for the lonely neighbor next door, adopting an orphan overseas (a portion of their allowance each week goes to that child), singing to a nursing home to add a little joy. The goal of getting kids involved in charity is not about winning the Nobel Peace Prize, but to give them the opportunity to experience goodness.

The truth is, kids don’t learn how to be kind from reading about it in a textbook, but from doing kind deeds. The more children witness or experience what it feels like to give, the more likely they will develop a charitable spirit. And that’s how we’ll raise the next generation to be good, caring people. What are you doing to help your children learn the value of giving to others?

Material of the Month

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Cultural Materials

The Cultural area of the Montessori classroom covers a variety of subjects. Geography, Science, Botany, Zoology, and History are included. Art and Music are also considered a part of the Cultural Area of the classroom. The Montessori cultural studies is another thing that makes the Montessori classroom different from other ones. Maria felt that having knowledge and understanding of such subjects is what makes one a "cultured" person.

I am going to be including Geography, Science, Botany, and Zoology as the focus of the Cultural Area. Art and Music are in their own category, although they tie in with monthly unit studies. History is covered in greater detail as the children progress through the elementary part of a Montessori school. Unit studies that are found in the curriculum pages, is where the Cultural breakdown for the classroom is found. Daily group lessons are based on these four main areas of the Cultural part of the classroom. The curriculum is organized into monthly unit studies and throughout the month, subjects in Geography, Botany, Zoology, and Science are discussed.

Geography - During the year subjects discussed in Geography are things such as; land, air, and water, maps, continents, people, food and music from other countries. I like to take each continent and learn about it during the month. I set up a continent table each month with items from different countries for each continent. Curriculum pages break these down monthly.

Geography Shelf



Montessori Maps and Continent Table

Science - Unit studies in science include subjects as; four seasons, the five senses, why leaves change color, layers of the earth, parts of a volcano, and biomes of the earth. I include some simple science experiments as well. The curriculum pages will break these, and other science subjects, down monthly. The materials will be changed on this shelf monthly as the unit studies change.



Science Shelf

Zoology - This is the area where the focus is learning about animals. I like to start with the five classes of vertebrates and have further lessons on each of the five. Invertebrates will be discussed also including insects, worms, and spiders. I think it is important to have classroom pets and so try to have one vertebrate and one invertebrate. We have a hamster and two hermit crabs. The curriculum pages will break these unit studies down monthly and works on the shelf change accordingly.



Zoology Shelf

Botany - Seeds, parts of a plant, kinds of trees, herbs and spices, and what plants give us, are some of the unit studies that are discussed in Botany. This shelf will change monthly as well as the unit studies change. The curriculum pages will have the breakdown of the subjects and discuss how to present lessons.



Botany Shelf