

Giving With Intention: Including Children in Volunteerism and Donations

According to a 2013 study by United Health, people who regularly volunteer experience less stress, better health, and greater overall contentment and engagement in life – just one more reason to make a family commitment to volunteerism. But parents often wonder how to get started, especially when children are young. Remember, teaching your children to be givers isn't a one-shot event, but a lifelong venture. Focus on developing a family attitude of giving and choose activities that match your children's developmental levels and your family's interests and values. Below you'll find more tips for volunteering with children:

Include giving in your budget. People of many religious faiths give a charitable contribution of 10 percent of their income, but regardless of your religious views, intentionally setting aside money for giving has numerous benefits. When you budget for giving, you have the means to make a difference for others. Equally important though, intentional giving teaches lessons in gratitude, self-discipline, and selflessness. Teach your children to budget for giving both through example and through direct lessons. If you give your children an allowance, help them to set up a simple jar or envelope system of giving, saving, and spending by allocating percentages of their money to each category. For example, 10 percent could go to the giving fund, 20 percent could go toward saving for a large expense such as a bike, and 70 percent could go to spending. When children learn to budget for giving from an early age, this trait becomes engrained in their character. Choose to give to a specific cause that reflects your values and inspires family commitment, such as Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, a non-profit organization committed to providing positive play spaces for children experiencing transition.

Make giving a lifestyle. The lessons of giving and volunteerism are more likely to stick if they're ongoing activities, rather than once a year events, and even small, seemingly insignificant activities teach children big lessons. Make sure your children see you helping others, whether that means delivering a meal to a shut-in, volunteering at the school, or organizing a large charity event. Express happiness and enthusiasm for opportunities to help and encourage your children to get involved as well. Help your children understand that giving and volunteerism isn't something we do just when others are watching, but rather an intrinsic attitude of generosity, respect, and love for all humanity. This means that how we treat our siblings and family at home every day is just as important as any act of charity elsewhere.

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Bright Horizons® is committed to giving back to the communities where we live and work in partnership with the *Bright Horizons Foundation for Children®*. Our mission carries into our centers and schools where building empathy and compassion is infused into the *World at Their Fingertips®* curriculum for children. Together, with our committed teachers, caring parents and Bright Horizons clients and partners, we are raising compassionate children, growing givers and creating a better world. For more information about the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children visit www.brighthorizonsfoundation.org

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Get inspired. Once you've made giving a regular priority in your family, it's time to go further. Set goals for larger charitable projects. You can find inspiration in numerous places.

Talk with friends, teachers, pastors, or community leaders to learn of needs in your area. Visit websites such as [Doing Good Together](#) for inspiring tips based on other families' experiences. When giving becomes a priority, you'll find ideas everywhere you look. Support your children's goals for giving. Maybe your child wants to raise funds by holding a bake sale or an art sale. Pull out the cookie trays or the paint smocks and lend a hand. Head over to [Bright Horizons Foundation for Children](#) for more fundraising ideas. Check with your local school or child care center for volunteer opportunities. Our Bright Horizons centers, for example, are helping to make volunteering easy and personal for center families. Ask your center about the Brightening Lives Activities where families come together to do an activity to benefit children and families in crisis.

Children bring an energy and focus to volunteerism that tends to snowball. When one child is excited about giving, other children soon follow and extraordinary things can happen. Start small, but don't limit your vision. Children have the capacity to dream of things adults might never consider. Volunteering as a family is one of the most meaningful experiences you'll have with your children.

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