



Contribution:

How Giving to Others Benefits Your Child's Development and Your Family's Strength

Many studies of child health and development show that children thrive best when they have opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to their family, neighborhood or larger community. Recent research also shows that families are stronger when they reach out together in service to their community. Yet, a very small percentage of families report that they do so.

I. Underlying Issues

- At every age, from toddlers to teens to the elderly, people are healthier, happier and more confident when they realize that they can contribute something of value to their community.
- When these experiences of contribution begin very early in life (when a child's sense of self is first developing), there is a lasting impact on the child's learning and development.
- When families reach out to their community together, they reap benefits as individuals and in their family relationships. The upcoming holiday season affords countless opportunities to reach out in ways large and small, so it's a great time to start a new habit of contribution.

II. Tips for parents

- Let your child do meaningful work in the home from the earliest age
This begins with toddlers carrying their dishes to the kitchen counter; preschoolers making their beds and helping to fold clean towels; a big brother reading a story to a little sister or helping her tie her shoes.
- Engage your child in family problem-solving and decision-making
For example, if you have a small budget for the holidays, have your child help think of affordable gifts or activities. Let your child help plan and prepare a meal once a week. If your family is too overscheduled (like most of us!), let your child generate ideas about how to make sure you create time for family.
- Help your child choose an age-appropriate way to give to others
This could be saving allowance to buy a gift for a needy child, raking leaves for an elderly neighbor, or volunteering for a more formal service program through school, your place of worship or a community agency. Guide your child in discovering the possibilities, but let the choice be your child's so that the service has more personal meaning.
- Choose a service project for your family to do together
There are countless opportunities – sponsoring a family for the holidays, stocking food shelves or serving meals, doing clean-up on a highway or in a park, participating in the Walk to End Hunger, preparing gift boxes for soldiers or their families. Start small, think about making service a part of your family's holiday traditions. Then, as you reap the benefits, think about carrying the tradition throughout the year!