

The Value of Community Service

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Over the years, my kids and I have participated in a number of community service opportunities as a family. Whether it be collecting canned goods for the local food pantry, cleaning up a local school, or raising money for animal conservation, there are a number of excellent activities suited for children. The experience of serving others and the world at large have given my children a perspective about their place in the world, namely that even though they are young, children can still make a difference.



How to Serve Others

Serving others gives children a sense of connectedness to people. It's very easy for children to get caught up in the routines of the everyday – the same class, the same grocery store, the same friends, the same teachers. For many reasons, structure is needed to help create a sense of safety for children. However, when we provide opportunities for children to see the needs of others, it shows

them we all live and interact with one another in community. Being a good neighbor has to start with us teaching our children how to cultivate healthy connections with others. Community service appropriate for cultivating connectedness include singing songs at a convalescent hospital, making get-well-soon cards for sick children in a local hospital, or even cleaning up a local school or park for the enjoyment of neighbors.

Community service projects help develop empathy. When you're collecting canned goods for the local food pantry or bringing jackets and socks to be distributed at a local homeless shelter, children will ask the inevitable question of why people will need such basic necessities. This gives us parents the perfect opportunity to teach our children to be thankful for their possessions, but more importantly, to see others' struggles. When children are able to see the needs of others, it will inspire them to respond in care and address others' needs with compassion.

Preparing for community service gives a broader perspective of the world. If children are passionate about recycling, have them read information that will inform them about the impact of plastic dumped in landfills. If children are passionate about endangered animals, have them research information about the animals' country of origin and how their habitat have been affected. Whatever it is that drives children to care, use that opportunity to enable them to respond responsibly and make things right in the world.

Reinforcing Family Values

In this day in age, it behooves us all to teach our children how to live in unity, to look beyond themselves, to love mercy, walk humbly, and act justly. What community service projects have you and your family completed together? What are you willing to try in the coming season?

Together, seeking a better world for our kids,

Jaime

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