

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



TEACHING CHILDREN GENEROSITY

Generosity during the holiday season? an oxymoron?

For too many American children, the holiday season consists of "making their lists and checking them twice" to make sure they have asked for and receive as many gifts as possible. But, what brings more happiness? Receiving gifts or giving gifts?

Recent research demonstrates that those people who give to others are more likely to be happier - regardless of whether the giver is rich or poor. A study evaluating surveys from 136 countries found that "prosocial spending is associated with greater happiness around the world, in poor and rich countries alike." Even when participants in one study were given money to purchase items for charity, they felt better than those who were given money to spend on themselves. The authors suggest that generosity is a universally important social theme.

Aknin LB, Barrington-Leigh CP, et al. Prosocial spending and Well Being: Cross Cultural Evidence for a Psychological Universal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2013; 104:635-652.

So, how can parents today, especially during the holiday season, encourage the development of generosity? We hope today's newsletter will give you some easy, practical ideas - and we wish you and your families a very blessed season and 2015.



RELATIONSHIPS

A study of 1365 married couples found that those couples who performed small acts of kindness, displayed respect and affection, and showed a willingness to forgive the spouse's faults or failings were more likely to experience marital satisfaction and less likely to consider divorce. This



TODDLERS and PRESCHOOLERS

Toddlers

Toddlers are just beginning to learn the concept of ownership - and one of their favorite new words is "mine". So it is unreasonable to expect a toddler to voluntarily share anything.

But you can begin to



ELEMENTARY AGE

Research shows talking to children is beneficial

The University of Notre Dame's Science of Generosity Initiative has performed many experiments investigating this character trait. One study showed that there are some genetic predispositions that influence the tendency to give. In addition, one researcher found that "talking with children about giving raises the probability of their giving by 18.5 percent over not talking to them about it."



ADOLESCENTS

A meaningful life

Adolescents need to know that their lives are meaningful and have purpose. A teen who sees a purpose for his life and who is involved in meaningful activity will be much less likely to participate in high risk behaviors and more likely to consider long-term goals during decision

seems so obvious - but it is nice to know that science confirms generosity builds strong relationships.

Dew J and Wilcox WB. Generosity and the Maintenance of Marital Quality. J of Marriage and Family 2013; 75:1218-1228.

One reason for this may be the increase in oxytocin that is known to occur when people are generous. Oxytocin is often called the "bonding" hormone, but is also released when people demonstrate generosity.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-moral-molecule/200911/the-science-generosity>

WAYS TO GIVE

Time

Giving of our time is often more meaningful than giving gifts or money - and may also include giving of our talents.

You are demonstrating generosity when you share your time with your children - feel free to say, "I'm spending time playing with you now, and I enjoy sharing my time with you."

Talents

Sharing your abilities and skills with others occurs easily in the workplace, but consider allowing your children to see you using your talents while volunteering. Encourage your children to share their skills by walking a neighbor's dog, coloring a picture for a grandparent, singing or playing a musical instrument at a skilled nursing facility.

Treasures

Treasures are the things we accumulate as well as our money. This is the perfect time of year to go through all the closets in your home and find clothing, toys, and food that can be donated to the less fortunate.

Allow your children to

introduce the concept of sharing and giving in simple ways:

1. When you are putting food on your toddler's plate, say, "I'm sharing food with you."
2. Talk about taking turns when holding a book.
3. Use the words "please" and "thank you".
4. Give your toddler two of the same item and ask her to give one of those to another person. "Here are two sandwiches. Please share one sandwich to Dad and you can eat the other one."

Preschoolers

Research

This is a wonderful time to teach so many character traits, including generosity.

New research shows that children as young as 3 years of age will take the merit of the situation into consideration when determining whether or not to share. So - do talk with your children about other's feelings.

Patricia Kanngiesser, Felix Warneken. Young Children Consider Merit when Sharing Resources with Others. PLoS ONE, 2012; 7 (8): e43979 DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0043979](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0043979)

1. Let your child see you giving to others. "We are going to bake cookies and take them to our neighbors."
2. Talk about what other people might like. "Oh, you would like a doll. What do you think your sister would like?"
3. When a friend is coming over to visit, help your child choose ahead of time which toys will be shared. As adults, we don't share everything in our house with company. So, too, your child should

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/02/130227102940.htm>

Develop awareness

Introduce your children to social issues, such as poverty or clean water, that are important to you.

Read books about the issue. There are many children's books on social issues - just search the internet for the topic of interest to you.

Consider spending one day without using your tap water or miss one meal to teach your children what life is like in other countries / communities.

Set the example

During family mealtimes include discussions of how you choose to spend your money. If you give to charities, let your children know - and tell them how happy it makes you to be able to help others.

If the charity is local, consider visiting with your children so they can better understand how money is being used.

Have a family meeting

Consider choosing a social issue or charity for the family to help.

Brainstorm together, thinking of ways your family can help. Children are so creative - but consider:

1. Giving 10% of all money received as gifts
2. Selling children's baked items, drawings, crafts
3. Having a garage sale for all the unneeded treasures found in your home when cleaning out closets

This is a great opportunity for children to develop initiative, creativity, responsibility, and persistence as well as generosity - depending upon the project chosen.

Think of other ways besides money by which you can impact the lives of others:

1. Write thank you notes to the firefighters, police officers, emergency personnel, mail person.
2. Call an elderly relative to say hi
3. Bake a meal and take to a person who is elderly or ill
4. Mow the lawn for a neighbor - just for fun!

Praise generosity

When you see your child being generous - specifically praise the behavior. "I so enjoyed seeing you share your new game with your brother."

Don't provide rewards when children demonstrate generosity. Their sense of well being is their reward.

making.

Maton KI. Meaningful Involvement in Instrumental and Well-Being: Studies of Older Adolescents and At Risk Urban Teen-Agers. Am J of Community Psychology 1990; 18:297.

Volunteer - locally and internationally

There is nothing like volunteering to instill your teen with a sense of gratitude, generosity, and a reason for living.

Search for opportunities, local and internationally, that will allow your teen to safely experience a life devoid of materialism.

Short term projects

Challenge your child (probably middle school and up) to come up with a project to help an individual, organization, church, etc. Put them "in charge" of determining how to help: a local child with cancer, disaster victims, family in need. This teaches responsibility, decision-making, generosity and builds maturity.

Develop a long term project

Encourage your teen to develop a long term project that will benefit others - such as those experienced by Boy Scouts in pursuit of their Eagle Scout award.

Even more exciting - work on the project as a family.

decide which of their treasures they will donate - and remind them they should give items that they would actually enjoy receiving - i.e. not the dirty, old, misshapen stuffed animal they have outgrown.

Thanks

Giving thanks is an easy way to spread generosity. Encourage your children to write thank you notes after receiving gifts this holiday season. Even a three year old can draw a picture.

be able to put away special toys that will not be shared.

4. Read books about kindness, sharing and generosity.

5. When you see someone else sharing, point it out to your child. Talk about how good it feels to share - and how much the recipient appreciates it.

Allowance

People have varied opinions regarding the desirability of giving children an allowance, but providing children with a small amount of money allows you to teach them financial principles, including generosity.

Consider providing your child with three "banks" or jars or envelopes. Show him that every time he earns or receives money, he should divide the money into three portions - one for him to be able to use, one for him to save for something (teaching delayed gratification), and one to be used to help others (teaching compassion and generosity).

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