



FAMILY GIVING NEWS

Six Tips on Raising Philanthropic Children

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Providing for children not only involves ensuring that they have clothes on their backs, roofs over their heads, and food in their stomachs, it also requires that families supply a sense of appreciation for their gifts, monetary and otherwise, and the desire to share those gifts with others. But when should parents begin teaching children about philanthropy? If children are too young to understand wealth, fiscal responsibility or monetary value, how does a parent convey the value and importance of charitable giving? How can parents interest their children in volunteer work or engage teenagers when they are in their anti-everything phase? How can they pass on a family tradition of giving and prepare children for board service while acknowledging and respecting each child's individuality?

Many of these questions will be addressed in our upcoming presentation of the Family Philanthropy Teleconference Series, "Raising Charitable Children," hosted by Kathryn Agard, Executive Director of Learning to Give (<http://www.learningtogive.org/>). Learning to Give, one of our Family Philanthropy Online Content Partners, is dedicated to educating youth about philanthropy, developing philanthropic behavior among them, and empowering them to become active citizens working for the public good.

To prepare for this conversation, below you will find six tips for teaching your children about philanthropy and how to help them turn that education into practice and into a lifelong habit of giving. Readers can also find more answers related to the role of children in a family's philanthropy and preparing the next generation by referring to the resources list below.

Begin the tradition of giving as soon as your child begins receiving

It's never too early to teach lessons about giving and sharing. They're lessons we all begin learning in kindergarten or as part of our religious or spiritual upbringing, but sometimes they become so elemental that we cease to be aware of their importance. Each of us is aware of our duty to share what we are given with those less fortunate, but in the hustle and bustle of living we often forget to turn belief into action. Learning about philanthropy is the first step, practicing it and incorporating it into your family's everyday life is the second. For very young children, whose grasp of monetary value is not strong and whose attention span may be short, select an activity like collecting pennies for UNICEF on Halloween or helping to bake cakes for a community bake sale. In addition to having fun and spending time together, explain how these activities are made even more special by helping others.

Encourage slightly older children to set aside a portion of allowances and monetary gifts to be donated to charity, and at the end of the year help him or her select a cause to which the funds will be given. This process can be as formal as setting aside a separate bank account and soliciting informational packets from local nonprofits, or as informal as purchasing a divided piggy bank or rinsing out an old coffee can. Being involved in the process of giving will help your child feel invested in the causes he or she chooses.

Make philanthropy a family affair

No matter what sort of philanthropic tradition your family has, begin including your children as soon as you feel they are ready and to the extent to which they are capable and happy to be involved. Make children aware of the processes that are integral to your family's philanthropy, whether they be attendance at annual board meetings, grant proposal review and decision-making, or a whole range of activities. The way in which you view and respond to the duties and activities related to your philanthropy will color the way your child views his or her future responsibilities. Discuss your hopes for your children's involvement in your philanthropy and listen to your children's philanthropic aspirations, but avoid onerous expectations. Don't despair if your child shows little or no interest at a given age: a young adult child may be preoccupied with completing his or her education, launching a career, or starting a family. This doesn't mean that he or she will remain permanently disinterested, simply keep him or her abreast of developments within your family philanthropy and leave options for participation open.

Support your community's philanthropic education initiatives

With many schools across the country now requiring students to fulfill a civil service requirement in order to graduate from high school, more and more children are becoming acquainted with organized giving and volunteering. If your child's school does not already have a volunteering program, suggest such a program to your local school board as a means of rounding out its students' education. To find out more about how your child's school can launch a volunteer program that is age-appropriate and successful, visit <http://www.idealists.org/teachers/startvolprogram.html> .

It may even make sense for your foundation or donor-advised fund to make a contribution to get the program off the ground. Be aware, though, that your child may not feel comfortable with the family contribution becoming common knowledge, as it may change the dynamic between him or her and others in the class or the school. This goes for any cause you or your child may choose to support with which he or she is intimately involved, whether it be a sports team, theater group, or other community organization. Discuss how perceptions of wealth affect the way in which your family is perceived by others in the community with your child, and give the option of making an anonymous donation.

Find a cause your child is passionate about

As children grow older they often struggle to assert their independence from their families and to establish a unique identity for themselves beyond familial roles and expectations. For teenagers in particular, this struggle may manifest itself in a distinctly contrarian attitude, as they attempt

to define themselves based on what their family is not. A child who once enjoyed annual family outings to plant trees in a neighborhood park, sort canned goods at a local food bank, or attend a board gathering, may suddenly balk at spending their Saturday afternoon with their parents, younger siblings, or other family members. This does not mean, however, that the child's civic involvement must go on either temporary or permanent hiatus. Sit down with your child and find out what causes he or she is passionate about: if you can't tell by the child's outside interests or the posters on his or her bedroom walls. Encourage your child to find a volunteer opportunity that suits his or her interests and talents. Allowing a child to establish and pursue his or her own philanthropic agenda can be a valuable way of both reinforcing the importance of giving back to the community and allowing them exercise their independence.

The Frances Hollis Brain Foundation appoints next generation family members to an advisory board at age 16 when they begin making grants of their own out of a percentage of the foundation's annual payout. Trustee Diane Bryant stresses the need to really listen to your children and assess their reactions to different activities and situations. In involving her own children, the foundation's third generation, Bryant explained: "It's very important to bring kids in where they are and let them go with their level of comfort. . .no expectations. One child may be comfortable feeding the homeless and another may not. It's really important to applaud any initiative."

Find your child a philanthropic mentor or hero

If your child is hesitant to become involved in philanthropic activities, even in areas that pique his or her interest, try finding an adult in your community who is committed to helping others. Perhaps a particularly respected or well-liked teacher or soccer coach, a minister, pastor, or rabbi, or even an older cousin or other family member with whom your child would feel privileged to spend time. Spending time with another civic-minded adult will give your child a measure of independence and sense of individuality, as well as expose him or her to philanthropic opportunities outside the family's collective area of interest. Not only will this broaden your child's horizons, but may also infuse your family philanthropy with new ideas and renewed energy once your child joins your board or advisory board.

Be your child's philanthropic hero

It's often said that children learn by example, and the greatest way to ensure that charitable giving is a significant and valued part of your children's lives is to ensure that it plays a large role in your own life. Make sure that your children understand not only the charitable tasks, duties, and responsibilities that you and your family take on, but also the joy you derive from these things. Share your experiences with them when things go well, and share the lessons you have learned when things don't turn out as you'd hoped or planned. Look at the impact that your role has had in shaping, or reshaping, your family's philanthropic legacy and examine the path you took to arrive where you are now. And look forward to discovering the paths your children will take, and the ways in which their talents and enthusiasm with help that legacy grow and evolve.

Resources on Charitable Children and Preparing the Next Generation

Connecting to Your Family's Foundation: A Primer for the Next Generation prepared for the Association for Small Foundations by the National Center for Family Philanthropy.

Findings and Recommendations for Encouraging a Tradition of Voluntary Action Among America's Youth (<http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/engagingyouth.html>) by the Independent Sector

The Giving Family: Raising Our Children to Help Others by Susan Crites Price

Growing to Give : Instilling Philanthropic Values in Teens and Preteens by Darlene Siska

Idealist.org for Kids & Teens (<http://www.idealist.org/kt/index.html>)

Moonjar.org Philanthropy Workbooks (<http://www.moonjar.com/Philanthropy.aspx>)

Resource Generation (<http://www.resourcegeneration.org/>)