

Overview

From the time that children are just toddlers, they try to be helpful. They imitate their moms and dads, dusting off tables and chairs or trying to sweep the floor.

Initially, children just like to imitate what their parents are doing. Soon after, they learn that helping behaviors will get them praise and attention, and so they find new ways to help out and to be grown-up. In the normal course of development, young children initially try and help the familiar people around them. As they grow older, they learn that it is also important to be helpful to people who they don't know very well, if at all. As they enter adolescence, they begin to see that being helpful can also be an abstract concept. For example, you can help future generations—people you will never know—by helping the environment.

While almost all children see the importance of being helpful when they are very young, we find that some children continue this behavior, while others do not. Whether a child is helpful or not seems to be related to his family and culture. When helpfulness is highly valued, children continue to seek ways to help others, as they grow older. This becomes part of their self-image. But when children are not required to be helpful, or when they see that the adults around them are more self-centered, then, they will not likely see this as an important behavior.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that does not always prize helpful behavior the way that it should. As children grow older, they see that the cultural heroes are rock stars, ball players, actors, and actresses. They only occasionally hear about the heroic efforts of those who are dedicated to helping others, such as President Jimmy Carter who has devoted his life to building houses for the poor, or Colin Powell who has championed the cause of mentoring.

No one can argue that being helpful is an important behavior for all children to learn. It will help children at home, with their friends, and at school. As you make helpfulness a focus in your classroom, you will find that everyone's spirits are lifted and even difficult days become easier.

Classroom Discussion

Begin the week with a discussion about the importance of being helpful. Try and get the children in your class to see that they should seek opportunities to be helpful everyday.

Questions for Younger Children

1. How do you help your parents around the house?
2. Why is it important to be helpful in school?
3. What are some of the chores you do at home?
4. What happens if you don't do your chores?

Questions for Older Children

1. What does this expression mean: "A friend in need is a friend indeed?"
2. Name something that you did to help a friend?
3. Why do people give money to charities to help people that they don't even know?
4. What is a way that you can be helpful in your school?

Write Your Own Questions Here

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

A Story About Being Helpful

Darcy was the most helpful child that anyone had ever known. Her teachers, her parents, her friends, even the dogs and cats in the neighborhood knew that if they ever needed anything, Darcy was there to help.

When Mrs. Fiddler, Darcy's teacher, lost her purse, Darcy looked all over the school and found it under a bush. (Don't ask me how it got there. No one seemed to know.)

When Darcy's father came home from work with a headache, Darcy immediately turned off the TV, dimmed the living room lights, and brought her father a cold glass of water.

When Darcy's friend Damon was sick and had to go to the hospital for a week, Darcy visited or called everyday. Damon always felt better when he talked to his friend.

When Darcy saw a stray cat or a lost dog, she immediately found her mother and they both helped the animal out. By last count, Darcy had returned 17 pets to their owners, and found new homes for three more.

The news of Darcy's helpfulness spread far and wide. People all over her state began to talk about Darcy and how much they admired her. Many children began to try and be more helpful too. They formed Helping Clubs to find ways to be more helpful, and they wrote Darcy for an autographed picture to hang on the wall. Darcy became the most popular name for new babies. Many parents said, "If we call our baby 'Darcy' perhaps she will grow up be helpful like the real Darcy. Wouldn't that be wonderful."

Eventually, even the Governor of the state heard about Darcy's helpfulness. He decided to establish a special scientific committee to study Darcy to find out what made her so helpful. Darcy's parents said that this would be all right since they certainly wanted everyone to be more helpful. (And I'm sure that you are not surprised to hear that Darcy wanted to help people be more helpful too.)

Six famous doctors came to Darcy's home, and lived with her for a week. They followed her around, and gave her a physical examination. They watched her eat, and even watched her sleep. Every night they would gather to talk about what they had learned. And every night, they always ended up talking about all the helpful things that Darcy had done that day. At the end of the week, the scientists wrote a report to submit to the Governor. It didn't take them very much time, because it only had one sentence.

"Darcy is so helpful because it makes her feel good."

The Moral of the Story: **Good deeds are their own reward.**

Learn By Doing

Helping Pictures

SUMMARY: Children are asked to find and display pictures of people helping others.

AGES: 3-6 years.

OBJECTIVE: Children will learn to identify ways that they can be helpful at home and in school.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Magazines with many pictures, scissors, tape or glue, and drawing paper.

TIME: 10 minutes.

WHAT TO DO:

1. Distribute magazines to small groups of children.
2. Ask children to look through the magazines and find pictures that show people helping other people. (You can also give children the option of drawing their own pictures.)
3. Ask children to find 1 picture, cut it out, and tape it onto a plain sheet of paper.
4. Ask children to take turns showing the group their pictures, telling everyone what the people in the pictures are doing to help someone else. The teacher should write the kind of helping behavior on each page (e.g. clearing the dinner table, putting toys away, washing the black board, etc.).
5. Make a list of all the ways that people can help each other on the black board or on a large poster.
6. Display the pictures around the room.

May I Help You?

SUMMARY: This is a role-playing activity where children act out scenes of people helping others in stores, restaurants, and so on. This activity can be done in separate groups, or one group of children can play out the scene in front of the whole class.

AGES: 4+ years.

OBJECTIVE: Helping is an everyday occurrence in service businesses. The children can practice using helping words and having a helping attitude by improvising scenes in familiar business settings.

MATERIALS NEEDED: A table or large box.

BEFORE YOU START: Set up a table or a large box to use as a pretend store counter.

TIME: 10 minutes.

WHAT TO DO:

1. Explain to the children that there are many stores and places of business where the employees ask the customers, "May I help you?"
2. Ask the children to think of the stores or other places of business where they have visited. (Example: grocery store, post office, restaurants, and other stores.) Make a list.
3. Tell the children that when a store or restaurant employee asks, "May I help you?," a polite customer will say, "Yes, thank you" before saying what s/he wants.
4. Ask the children to choose a store or business.
5. Using a table or large cardboard box as a counter, let the children take turns practicing being a store/restaurant employee who asks, "May I help you?" and pretending to be customers. Let the children create the helping scene for as long as polite dialogue takes place.
6. You may wish to suggest creating a restaurant scene (either fast-food or sit-down type) so that more than two children can improvise at the same time.
7. Talk about body language, like smiling and making eye contact as well as helping language.
8. Emphasize that the "customers" in the store should be helpful too.

Creating A Helping Project

Talking about helping is important, but actually helping people is the real test of whether this lesson is learned. Here are some projects that will make helping an everyday experience.

Tutoring Younger Children

Older children can help younger children with reading or special projects. Even first graders enjoy playing with children in kindergarten or preschool if they are told that this will help them learn.

Food Drive

Contact a local food bank and see what kinds of foods you can collect for the hungry and needy. Make this an ongoing project, not a one-time event. Take children on a field trip to the food bank, so they can meet the people who make a living out of helping others.

Helping Begins At Home

Have children ask their parents how they can be more helpful at home. Ask parents to write a "thank you note" to their children when they have been particularly helpful, and then read these notes in class.

Finding Organizations To Support Your Efforts

Every community has service clubs that are dedicated to helping others. Ask one of them to send a speaker to your classroom and talk about their projects. See if there are ways that your class can help out. Community involvement is best way to keep the "helping spirit" active in the school.