PARENTS USE the Power of Choice YOUR POWER

Volunteering Provides a Lifetime of Benefits

Volunteering is a good thing—a very good thing. Volunteers provide services that benefit others. But volunteering actually provides the person volunteering a multitude of personal benefits. Researchers are finding that if the volunteer is an adolescent, the benefits and sense of personal achievement will last a lifetime.

Adolescents who volunteer are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking, using drugs or skipping school. Volunteering increases self-esteem and gives adolescents the opportunity to learn, practice and demonstrate responsibility and empathy. Volunteering cultivates a better understanding of others and allows adolescents to connect with people of different ages, backgrounds and lifestyles than they might typically encounter in their daily life. Adolescents who volunteer have a more positive outlook on life and achieve a greater sense of connectedness with others. Adolescent volunteers develop social skills and begin to recognize that they have the ability to make a difference in their world. They then become more motivated to take action and develop more positive attitudes toward others.

Researchers have found that volunteers actually report health benefits from volunteering. Volunteering increases endorphins that reduce pain and diminish stress. Volunteers also experience stronger immune systems, decreased hypertension, lowered blood pressure and cholesterol and fewer heart problems as adults.

Volunteering can also impact intellectual development. It can provide opportunities to learn new materials, expand knowledge and experience styles of learn that are different than those they encounter in school. Adolescents can learn new skills and gain new perspectives that allow them to see their world in a fresh way. Volunteering can open the door to college admissions, scholarships and jobs.

Individuals who begin volunteering during their elementary or middle school years, experience a sense of enlightenment about social issues that carries into adulthood. They are empowered to make the changes they want to see in the world.

Helping our adolescents to find the right volunteer opportunities for them is a process. Use this checklist to help narrow down the opportunities:

- What have I done in the past that I've enjoyed?
- What do I NOT want to do as a volunteer?
- How much time can I commit?
- What talents or skills can I offer?
- What kinds of people do I want to work with
- What would I most like to learn by volunteering?

Check out the Volunteer Opportunities for Youth and Families list to find the one that's right for your child.

May Prevention Principle

Research indicates that students who participate in service learning (volunteering) are up to 50% less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Service learning has a positive effect on students' personal development and social bonding.

Conversations that Count

Volunteering as a family unit is rewarding for everyone involved. It allows your child to see you working to help others (great modeling!) and provides a great bonding experience for your family to work as a team.
Use this month's PowerTalk: *Family Volunteer Project* to help you plan your family's volunteer experience!

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