

## We can make a difference



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.

### 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 is rewarding for everyone involved. It allows children to see their parents working to help others (great modeling!) and provides a bonding experience. It provides an opportunity for your family to work as a team and it benefits the individuals/organizations where our volunteer! Use this month's PowerTalk activity to learn how the individual talents of each member of your family can be put to use to make a difference for others.

### Tech Tips for Parents: Summertime boundaries for technology

One of the great joys of summer is the ability to be free of structured schedules and time constraints. This can also present challenges for parents who want to make sure that their adolescents are making wise choices about how to spend their expanded free time. This is especially true when considering your child's use of technology. Here are a few tips for setting summertime boundaries for your adolescent's use of technology:

- ⇒ Set time limits for daily technology use. Have a discussion with your child at the beginning of summer break about your expectations for technology use. Make sure your child is aware of those limits so they can plan their time.
- ⇒ Plan activities for your family that don't include technology—that includes the "grownups!"
- ⇒ Establish "technology free" zones of your home. Designate places/activities at your home where everyone must communicate without technology (i.e. talking with your voice and not with your thumbs).
- ⇒ Take time to make memories. Summertime offers 3 months of opportunities to create new family memories for your teen. Find some [ideas here](#).