



Why Support Your Kids in Making a Difference?

By Kathy Copeland, Ph.D., Mom of 4

What is the importance of promoting and supporting volunteerism in our youth of today? Moreover, what are the consequences of not promoting and supporting volunteerism in our youth of today? We live in the age of internet, instant messaging, texting, and cell phones. Instant gratification isn't just a desire of children, it is a reality. It is also a generation that has been more "me" focused than any other generation before. All of these things combined can result in isolated, impatient, and self-focused youth. The flip side to this argument is that this is a generation filled with bright children who have a wealth of information at their fingertips, who have a sophisticated knowledge base, and who are able to conceptualize their impact on the world.

Getting children involved in helping others at an early age makes it second nature to think less about themselves. It also empowers youth to problem solve. They see a problem and then figure out a way to fix it. Whether it is knitting caps for kids fighting cancer, doing a bake sale, or collecting coins for charity. Helping others and solving problems develops self-esteem. Kids feel good about themselves when they accomplish something worthwhile. Additionally, it is always important for our children to be reminded that there are many less fortunate than they.

As a mother of four, and a doctorate in psychology I have seen a theory put to practice that actually works in child rearing. That theory is that by focusing on the good that our children do, will make them want to do more of it. Whether it be playing nicely with others, helping around the house, getting a good grade; rewarding these positive behaviors encourages children to want to do more. My favorite parenting tip that has worked with my kids since they were two is "positive pennies". Throughout the day when I catch them doing something good I throw loose change in a jar and comment on the positive behavior. When the jar is full, we go do something fun as a family. We don't do "positive pennies" all the time, just when behavior needs a tune up.

Ripple Kids is like "positive pennies". It reinforces the positive behavior of making a difference in the community and focusing on helping others. It promotes teamwork, friendship, self-esteem, and empowerment. Ripple Kids is necessary to the community and to our schools. I encourage all parents and educators to have that discussion with your kids and students. Find out what matters to them, what ideas they have in making a difference, and encourage them to go out there and do it!