

# How to help your teens discover their philanthropic passions

As your young children grow into teens, their interests evolve and they become more engaged in broader aspects of life.

As parents, you certainly try to have a positive influence on them. It's natural to want them to establish a strong set of values that will carry through their lives. One way to share your values with your children and teens is by encouraging them to actively participate in charitable giving.

Teaching the joys, benefits and responsibilities of philanthropy is often a top-down process. Your children are likely influenced by the example you set. At the same time, as teenagers come into their own, some may take interest in their own causes and be self-motivated to get more directly involved in charitable efforts.

## **The importance of your own commitment**

For most families, the starting point in encouraging a philanthropic mindset in children is to identify specific values that matter to you and to live those values. Children will be encouraged to follow your lead when they see your own



commitment and witness your participation in such efforts.

The examples you set in terms of your broader money values will play an important role as well. They will learn from how you earn, manage and spend your money. As your children grow older, there is a benefit to sitting down with them and having frank discussions about finances. Handling money does not come naturally to most people – they have to learn from someone. That's a role you should accept.

## **Expanding their scope**

As your children grow into teens and become a bit more world-wise, it's good to encourage them to think outside of their normal sphere

of influence. They should begin to appreciate and realize that the life they lead does not represent reality for many others.

Promoting a philanthropic mindset can start on a simple level. Teens can be encouraged to participate in activities through their school, church or other organization to which they may have an association. The family can get involved in community service projects. You can even schedule family trips that have a charitable function built into it.

## **Explore their interests**

If you take time to sit down and have discussions about money with your children, also talk about ways to give back. Find out where their interests

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lie. Have they taken notice of a specific local charity, social cause or bigger picture issue? If so, they may be ready to start taking more direct action on their own.

Promote the fulfillment that comes from volunteering. It may be helpful to connect time spent in these efforts as a social activity in which they get their friends, you or other family members involved. There is power in numbers for charities who benefit from these efforts, and involving friends is a great way to motivate your teen kids toward action.

### **Taking them to a higher level**

If philanthropy is central to your family's financial priorities, teenage children are old enough to get involved. You may not initially include them directly in determining the allocation of family dollars to targeted charitable organizations, but they can be involved in other ways.

Some families have enlisted their teenage children to play the role of "secret shoppers." In this position, they volunteer with an organization that is under consideration by the family for charitable donations. The children can gain some first-hand knowledge working directly with the charitable organization and share that information with the family before financial gifts are made.

If the family has established a board to oversee philanthropic efforts, they sometimes will create

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a "junior board" to groom younger family members for a future role. A member of the full board often leads junior boards. They will assign tasks such as research on potential beneficiaries. This will provide participating teens with helpful experience that will better prepare them for more direct involvement in philanthropic decision-making for the family as they grow older.

### **Obstacles when encouraging teen involvement**

Teens are busy with school, friends and extracurricular activities. You'll find that making time for philanthropy will compete with several other interests. Consider setting aside a specific time – such as one weekend day a month – to devote to philanthropic efforts. This could mean the family gathers to do hands-on work for a charitable organization. Be intentional in scheduling such times regularly and require that all participants set those dates aside on their calendars.

Some teenagers may be reluctant or disinterested in the idea of giving back. If this is the case, try to

connect philanthropy to something they're interested in. For example, [Games4Sustainability](#) employs games and social simulations that can involve teens in activities that help them better understand some of the challenges facing the world. If they are game-oriented, this type of engagement may help them gain a greater appreciation for the personal satisfaction of philanthropic involvement.

### **Focus on their interests as well**

It isn't unusual that your interests don't always align with those of your children. You may need to sit down and have a discussion with your kids to find a point of connection. Encourage them to explore their interests, try things out, learn from their mistakes and grow from the experience. Encourage their own ideas, energy and excitement around causes they can relate to.

Most important, continue to set a good example through your own actions and giving plans. Your philosophy and engagement in philanthropic causes will set a meaningful example for them.



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