



ASK DR. DANA

Q. I want to teach my child what it really means to give this holiday season? Any ideas?

A. This time of year parents often decide to teach their children what it means to give to those less fortunate. Popular activities include volunteering at a soup kitchen or having children drop money into a collection box. While these contributions are important, think of activities your children can relate to and own.

- **Be concrete.** Dropping coins into a collection box can indeed make a difference, but most children, rooted in concrete thinking, can't understand where the money goes beyond the pail. It is easier for kids to "see" how they are giving when they buy items to donate and deliver with you. For example, since toys are at the forefront of children's minds, have them pick out a few special toys for kids that won't get many.

Contact your local school, church, or synagogue to adopt a family in need of holiday gifts or daily essentials. This year, through SUSD, my girls and I have adopted a little girl that has requested all things Barbie. We are going shopping and then will deliver the goodies to our designated school.

- **Consider your child's passions.** For example, does your child love animals? Donate money or time to an animal shelter or the zoo. You can also just fill up a bird feeder and give to your neighborhood birds. If your child is interested in the environment, take a family walk and pick up any trash you see.

- **You don't have to spend money.** Make sure your child understands the value of "gifts of time". Spending time with an elderly neighbor or relative is an act of giving. An older child reading to a younger cousin is an act of giving. Have your child create decorative I.O.U cards that he or she can give to a family member to be cashed in for extra babysitting, help with chores, or a just a hug.

The take away: The type of giving is less important than the opportunity to let kids "own" the act of giving. By owning it, your children will be more likely to fully experience the joy that comes with it. The challenge for all of us, given our overwhelming responsibilities, is to model giving all year long instead of just focusing on the Holiday season.