

Dr. Jenn: 10 Steps to Raise Kids Who Make a Difference

By Dr. Jenn Berman

Kids today are growing up in an increasingly superficial and disconnected world. They are bombarded with messages from the media telling them what they should buy, wear and look like, which leaves them feeling empty and unfulfilled. Making a difference in the world, having a sense of purpose and knowing that you can influence others leads to great self esteem. Having meaningful activities also decreases boredom, isolation and self-centeredness.

Raising a child who makes a difference requires parents to foster a sense of self efficacy in their kids, help children discover their passions, teach their children how to delay gratification and reduce entitlement and, of course, to model the behavior they hope to see in their children. I never said it would be easy! But here are a few places to start.

1. Read books. Include books about historical figures who stood up for what they believed in (Rosa Parks) or overcame great odds (Helen Keller), along with stories about a quality or belief that is important to your family.

2. Have family meetings. Having a weekly meeting teaches kids to speak in a group forum and lets them know that their ideas are valued.

3. Turn off the TV. The average American child sees 40,000 commercials and makes 3,000 requests for products and services per year. Children's focus on consumer culture has been linked to depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, psychosomatic complaints and increased conflict with parents.

4. Give chores and responsibilities. All children should have family responsibilities (clear your place at the table, put away your toys, make your bed,

etc.) as well as paid chores (rake leaves, take out the trash, water plants) as soon as they are old enough to do basic math and coordinated enough to handle tasks. A sense of giving back in their own home and the value of a dollar happens most easily when they earn that dollar.

5. Teach early giving. Teach children to give back to the community starting at a young age. Even toddlers and preschoolers can do something meaningful, like making a card to give to a sick child, helping an adult bake cookies to bring to the local firehouse, planting a tree, or helping collect cans for a food drive.

6. Make a "helping others" scrapbook. Using a scrapbook to memorialize good deeds allows children to look back on all the kind things they have done to help others.

7. Plan "Giving Vacations." Instead of another trip to Disney-land or Hawaii, plan a trip doing for others. Many organizations and websites list "volunteer vacation" opportunities, mostly for teens and older, to do things like build an orphanage, teach English, help children with special needs or restore coral reefs.

8. Let kids earn "the difference." Teach kids about the household bills and let them see where they can save money. Let them "earn" the money they save. If, for example they are able to decrease the electric bill by \$10, they earn \$10. This teaches them about household costs, makes them aware of wastefulness and helps them contribute to the home in a new way.

9. Start a "Dinner Table Foundation." Have a regular family meeting to decide where donations will go and how much will be donated (it does not have to be a large sum). Young children can choose from two or three charities



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after you explain what each charity does. Older children can pitch the charity of their choosing. Work together as a family to make the decision.

10. Make giving a year-round family activity. Many families have annual giving traditions like feeding the homeless at Thanksgiving, but it is important for children to see giving throughout the year. Try to create family giving opportunities every month.

Dr. Jenn Berman is the author of the LA Times best-selling books, SuperBaby: 12 Ways to Give Your Child a Head Start in the First 3 Years and The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids. Her first children's book Rockin' Babies will be released May 2011. She can be heard on the Cosmo Channel on Sirius XM every night from 5-7 pm PST. She has a private psychotherapy practice in Beverly Hills, and is the mother of twins.