

Children Who Care

Many parents have questions about instilling an attitude of caring in their children. When so much of a parent's time can revolve around caring for the needs of their children and making sure their child is happy, some children can start to develop the attitude of "it's all about me." This can lead to the challenge of teaching your child to share and recognize the needs in others.

Bringing children to the realization of what is going on in their community and the world, the fact that things are not as easy for some people as they are for us here, requires discernment on the parents' part to know what their child is ready to hear. Children will inevitably hear and learn of situations that are difficult for others. Building empathy and an attitude of gratitude for what they have can start early.

In our own community there are ways that you can involve even a young child in caring for others. At Christmas time there are many opportunities to give through various organizations and these are great conversation starters and chances to give during a season that so often focuses on "getting". It will bring more meaning to the situation if the child is able to pick out the gift or food item themselves that they are giving. What about the rest of the year?

While grocery shopping why not let your child pick out a non-perishable food item themselves and put it in the donation bin on your way out of the store. This involves them in a physical way, allows them to make a decision about what to give and opportunity for conversation about people's basic needs and resources in our community. Does your child know what happens to their clothing when they outgrow them and toys when they are given away? Perhaps you can involve your child in such decisions.

When your child hears of a troubling event in the life of a classmate or neighbour, you can encourage them to create a card or picture, or help bake cookies to give to that person or family. The belief of a young person that they can make a difference for good in the life of someone else can begin at a young age.

Volunteerism has become a much more common element of many junior and senior high schools. The experience and resulting effects of giving of your time and energies to a person or project without expectation of being rewarded cannot be obtained by any other means. There are many volunteer opportunities available for teenagers today on a local and global scale. These experiences can be life changing for them and others.

Of course, the best way a child learns any skills and attitudes is from a good role model. Parents who model care and concern for others in their community and in the world communicate the caring message with the strongest impact.

By Laurie Whitaker. Laurie is the Home Support Manager at Family Services of Central Alberta, your Parent Link Centre. For more information on parenting and family life, call 403-343-6400, or go to www.fsca.ca.