

Volunteering and Early Childhood Education



With the holidays approaching, it is the perfect time to talk to children about the importance of showing kindness to others. It is never too early to start having these conversations! We can start by teaching gratitude. Talk to the children about what it means to be “thankful”. Encourage them to share some things for which they are thankful. Remember, it can be something big or small. One child may say they are thankful for their family and another may say they are thankful for cookies. Both answers are perfect!



Here are a few books to help children begin thinking about gratitude:

- The Thankful Book - By Todd Parr
- Thanks a Million - By Nikki Grimes
- An Awesome Book of Thanks - By Dallas Clayton
- Gratitude Soup - By Olivia Rosewood

Once children have an understanding of what it means to be “thankful”, we can begin talking more about helping those less fortunate. One way to incorporate these ideas is through service learning. Service learning is defined as a method that combines community service with academics (Lake & Jones, 2008) and can include direct or indirect service. For the youngest children, the community may be within the program, but as children reach preschool age they can branch out into their surrounding community. When planning lessons, teachers can take into consideration how service might fit into their themes. For example, if the children are learning about animals, the class may want to collect food and supplies to donate to a local animal shelter.

One thing to keep in mind is that we do not always know the struggles that families within our programs are facing. When considering service ideas, it is best to stick to low cost activities so that all children and families can participate.

Service Ideas and Tips:

1. Start a food or clothing drive in your program. Many shelters and clothing banks accept used clothes. This makes it easier for families to donate things that they may already be discarding.
2. Plan a family event in conjunction with volunteering. Many programs plan events around the holidays. Think about having a table at which children and parents can make cards to mail to soldiers.
3. Hold a bake sale and donate the money to a local charity.
4. Think about providing more than one opportunity throughout the year for service.
5. Ask the families in your program if they have a charity or organization that is important to them.



Another idea is to have the children choose the type of service they would like to participate in. One idea is to present the children with options and let them vote. There are many local charities and organizations that would love to have your support. Here are a few options:

- **Food Bank of Delaware (Locations throughout Delaware)**- Committed to providing nutritious meals to those in need and working to find solutions to hunger and poverty throughout the state.
- **Ronald McDonald House (Wilmington)**- The Ronald McDonald House is located near A.I. DuPont hospital for children and provides a place to stay for families whose children are hospitalized.
- **The Shepherd Place (Dover)**- Non-profit homeless shelter for women and children.
- **Ministry of Caring (Wilmington)**- Supports the homeless and those in poverty throughout Wilmington
- **Children's Beach House (Wilmington & Lewes)**- CBH supports children with communicative disorders and special needs to help them be successful in life.
- **Alex's Lemonade Stand (National organization)**- Child cares can hold their own lemonade stands and donate the proceeds.

Remember, it is never too early to begin teaching children about gratitude and giving. The idea of service reaches across all cultures and religions and is a great way to create a sense of unity throughout your program.

Happy Holidays!