

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Teaching the Joy of Giving

WHEN WE PASSED OUT MUSICAL SHAKERS at preschool circle time, we were one instrument short. One child sang without a shaker in his hand as my co-teacher hurried to find him one. No word of protest escaped his lips.

Even though I knew that the teacher would be back with one soon, I asked after the first song if anyone would like to share his or her shaker with the little boy who had done without. I wanted to offer an opportunity for the children to put themselves in his place. Most children looked at me in disbelief. In the midst of this tense silence, a four-year-old girl leapt up and said, "I'll give him mine!" Her face was beaming.

We can offer lots of lectures to children on the value of giving and get back those familiar blank stares. However, research has shown that this girl's experience – of selfless giving – is what convinces children that generosity is worthwhile.

Adults can develop children's tendencies to be open-handed with others by commenting positively when they willingly share or offer something to a friend. "How did it feel when you gave that picture to your friend? Do you see how happy it made her?" During this gift-giving season, encourage your child to create gifts for others. Instead of focusing on her own wish list, invite her to think about what presents others might enjoy.

Let's concentrate on helping children believe that they have the power to give.

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