

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Good Deeds Are Their Own Reward

IF SOMEONE WAS STRUGGLING to reach down and tie her shoe, would you stop and do the task for her? That's what one of our four-year-olds did for a friend with loose shoelaces. Having just learned each step of shoe tying, he worked patiently, trying over and over to make the process work.

Young children seem to possess an innate desire to help others. Research shows that children as young as 14 months old will spontaneously try to help another person. For example, toddlers who see an adult trying but not succeeding at reaching for something, will attempt to get the object for the person themselves.

Will those behaviors continue as children get older? There are several variables involved. Studies show that if adults offer children a reward for their good deeds, they will be less apt to help the next time an opportunity presents itself. Children should not receive tangible rewards when they are already motivated toward positive action.

Giving children specific praise for their helpful actions does propel them to continue offering aid to others. Adults can also suggest positive actions that make others happy: offering to help a friend clean up, drawing a picture to lift someone's mood, carrying objects for someone whose arms are too full.

We can all work together by talking about the joy of aiding others and validating helpfulness wherever we see it so that children know we rank those actions as a top priority in our busy lives.

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