


THE
Secret
TO
Joyful Giving





Giving Tuesday is almost here, but if you feel like you might be missing out on some of the excitement, you're not alone. Although "the joy of giving" is a real and powerful thing, the truth is that most of us, children and adults alike, could use a little help connecting to that feeling.

If your family might benefit from a little giving inspiration, we suggest aligning your giving with the rest of your life—the things that really interest and excite you as individuals.

Here's how to do it.

Make It Personal



To make giving meaningful, we must first liberate it from the isolated, lonely silo of "stuff we're supposed to do" and connect it to our everyday interests and experience. Whether we're young or old, meaningful giving begins with sincere and genuine engagement.

YOUNG CHILDREN

The youngest members of your family may not have well-developed interests or extensive life experiences, but they do have feelings that can be developed into empathy and generosity. You can help young children tap into these feelings by asking them to draw pictures. Ask: "What things are you thankful for? What makes you happy? What makes you sad?"

By age three, children are typically developing awareness of other people's feelings, so it's the perfect time to introduce age-appropriate picture books that explore generosity and the power of giving. Here are a few suggestions:

Because of You: A Book of Kindness by B.G. Hennessy explains how acts of kindness, understanding, and generosity can make all the difference in the world.

Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy by Bob Sornson Ph.D. teaches children how to notice the feelings of others and why their feelings matter.

The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig tells how a simple act of kindness transforms Brian, an "invisible boy" who nobody seems to notice, into a friend.

You can also use books to answer young children's difficult questions about what they observe, such as: "Why did that man ask you for money? Why is that lady sleeping on the park bench?" (For example, ***The Lady in the Box*** by Ann McGovern deals candidly with homelessness.) As children start to become aware of complex social problems such as poverty and homelessness, they can often find comfort in the realization that you and they have the power to make an appreciable difference.



[Click here to see a more extensive list of picture, chapter, and young adult books about philanthropy and related issues.](#)

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

Older children have started to develop their own interests, like an obsession with amphibians or video games. They're also old enough to understand that action should follow empathy. However, rather than pushing charitable giving as a moral imperative, you can show these children

that giving can be an extension of something they already enjoy (like a favorite hobby) or connect to something they have personally experienced (like being sick or missing their family).

Examples of organizations that may be of particular interest to young people include:

- ➔ **Frogwatch USA:** Helps conserve amphibians by reporting data on the calls of local frogs and toads.
- ➔ **The AbleGamers Charity:** Customizes video game consoles to help individuals with disabilities play.
- ➔ **4 Paws for Ability:** Provides service dogs to children worldwide.
- ➔ **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust:** Saves orphaned and endangered elephants, rhinos, and giraffes.
- ➔ **A Million Thanks:** Supports and appreciates military men and women through letters and granting life wishes.
- ➔ **Ronald McDonald House:** Keeps families with sick children together and near the care and resources they need.
- ➔ **Heifer International:** Provides sustainable livelihoods to families in need through the gift of a goat, heifer, alpaca, or llama.



OLDER CHILDREN

As children enter their teen years, they have an increasing desire for independence, and their influences expand beyond their immediate families to include their school, their peers, their community, and popular culture. To help these older children connect to giving, look for opportunities to grant them agency, especially ones that intersect with these different spheres of influence. Here are a few ideas:

Community Service and Social Activism

You can take advantage of teens' growing desire to be with peers by encouraging them to get involved with friends, or to make new friends by exploring a cause. Many high schools require students to fulfill a civic service

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requirement, and college entrance authorities look favorably on such activities. Help teens find volunteer opportunities that satisfy these requirements while enabling them to discover their own interests, like building a skate park or lobbying local officials to clean up a hazardous waste site.

Star-Power Philanthropy

Celebrities are helping to make social action seem not only important, but exciting. Sports figures are also great philanthropic role models for teens who may be looking to heroes for inspiration. For a generation brought up in an Instagram-saturated, brand-conscious world, don't

discount cause-related marketing efforts that set aside a portion of profits for the social good.

More celebrity-fueled inspiration can be found through [WE](#), a charitable and educational organization that provides volunteer travel opportunities, school-based service learning programs, and stadium-filling events (WE Days) that bring together world-renowned speakers and performers with millions of young people to celebrate a commitment to service.

ADULTS

To forge a personal connection to your giving, pick an issue that has real meaning for you. Would you want to fast-track research for a rare disease that impacted a family member, save your school district's music education program threatened by budget cuts, or clean up a polluted lake in your hometown? If you need help to identify a meaningful issue, ask yourself:

- ➔ What makes me mad? "Every child in this country should be able to go to school without fear of being shot."
- ➔ What gets me fired up? "When I see a veteran reduced to homelessness, it just drives me crazy!"
- ➔ What do I think is really insane? "Why do we keep buying bottled water?"

If you focus on an issue that you find personally gratifying, your philanthropy will not only be more enjoyable, it will also be much more sustainable.



Make It Tangible

Making a difference is more satisfying than making a donation. Here's how you can ensure that your family sees and feels the impact of giving.

INVEST WISELY

A charitable donation isn't really a "gift"—it's an investment in change. Before sending a check to a nonprofit or clicking "donate," visit the organization's website and see if you can find answers to these questions:

- ➔ Does the organization have a clearly articulated mission statement? Vague, ambiguous intent ("dedicated to making the world a better place") often leads to vague, ineffectual projects.
- ➔ Does the organization meet a vital need? Look for data on the extent of the issue or problem the organization purports to address. How many people are affected by the problem, and what percentage of those people does the organization serve? Can you tell whether that percentage has increased or decreased over time?

- ➔ How sound is the organization's approach to solving the problem? Is it based on evidence and solid research?
- ➔ Is this organization unique, or are others doing similar work? To compare nonprofits working in the same area, visit a rating site like [Charity Navigator](#).
- ➔ How does the organization measure success? Although nonprofits often struggle to quantify outcomes, an organization should have more to offer than a few touching anecdotes. Is there tangible evidence that it is succeeding in addressing its articulated goals?
- ➔ Who sits on the board? Ideally, the board should be comprised of a mix of influential individuals and funding "rainmakers" as well as those with expertise relevant to the organization's mission.
- ➔ Has the organization gotten negative publicity? Even if you suspect that the organization has been falsely or unfairly tarred by controversy, bad publicity in the nonprofit world, whether or not it's deserved, can compromise an organization's ability to effectively serve its target population.



COUPLE GIVING WITH ACTION

In addition to making a donation, consider volunteering your time, especially as a family. For example, you might make a donation to an animal shelter and then spend a Saturday feeding and caring for the animals. Many shelters specifically need children to handle and play with their resident animals to help socialize them and prepare them for adoption by loving families.

PUT A FACE ON KINDNESS

Giving directly to individuals in need can be a powerful experience, and there are lots of ways to do it, especially during the holidays. Participate in your local post office's Operation Santa program, buying gifts and toys for specific children in need, or serve a holiday meal to the homeless. If you want to make giving to individuals a major focus of your family's donations, consider establishing a private foundation. The funds in a private foundation grow in a tax-advantaged environment, and the IRS permits private foundations to make grants directly to individuals for disaster relief, medical emergencies, and financial hardship.

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Make It a Family Tradition

Look for ways to weave giving into your family's daily life and special celebrations. At the holiday table and throughout the year, share family stories from your own childhood or even further back in your family's history. Any experience where a family member learned something about giving—how Grandpa helped neighbors down on their luck, or Aunt Anne planted a community garden—can be shared in the form of a story that will help children feel a sense of belonging to something bigger. As the younger generation begins to live their values, make sure that their stories are also shared, updating your family's tradition of giving to the present moment.

When giving is personal, connected to your interests and emotions, it's meaningful. And when your giving connects you to your family and the entire human family, you may find that it's also profoundly joyful.





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