



## 19 Ideas to Help Kids Serve at Home

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Why is it that we have to beg adults to serve, while children are always ready to give? Children seem to be born with a desire to serve others. Even a 2-year-old will automatically comfort a crying baby by sharing a toy.

In 2004 when the tsunami hit Southeast Asia, and again when the hurricanes hit the southern United States in 2005, kids were among the first to get involved. Children are pre-wired for service!

And Christian children have an added motivation to serve God. They serve the same God and have the same spiritual gifts as the rest of us. And they've been given the same challenge and promise from God: "You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For children, that might sound something like this: "You'll be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—at home and school, throughout your town, across the country, and to the ends of the earth."

Let's take a look at the many ways you can incorporate service into the fiber of your ministry from home to church to community to country to the world—just as in Acts 1:8.

### Service at Home

It's not as exciting as a missions trip to Africa, but contributing at home is truly the foundation for a lifetime of service. Here are ideas you can use to get kids serving at home.

- **Helper's Hints**—On slips of paper, have kids write or draw a picture of a way to serve each family member. Then place the slips in a decorated shoebox. For example, kids might write, "Make Mom's bed," "Give a hug," or "Do the dishes." Each morning kids can choose a slip of paper and use the "hint" to serve someone that day. Periodically have kids come up with new ideas to add to their boxes at home.
- **Flower Power**—Younger children can create six construction-paper flowers, while older kids may enjoy arranging six artificial flowers in a decorative plastic cup. Have kids write one way they'll serve their families on each flower. Kids can place the flowers at home where they'll see them every day and remember to serve.
- **Love Language**—Discuss with kids how service is doing what someone else needs, not simply doing what we like to do for others. Then ask kids to identify meaningful ways they can show love to their families. Have kids create a service plan for the following week and keep a short journal of people's reactions to their acts of service. Share reports the following week.

- Service Celebration—Challenge kids to complete one act of kindness for each family member during the week. In your classroom, have kids share ways they served their families so other kids get new ideas. Then serve the kids snacks as a celebration of their service.

### **Service at Church**

Provide opportunities for kids and their families to serve at church with these ideas.

- Sneak Surprise—Have preteens wash all the car windshields in your parking lot during worship services. Leave behind preprinted notes that say, "Jesus Loves You!"
- Toy Wash—Children can help your nursery staff by washing toys. Preschoolers and preteens can work together to scrub plastic toys according to your nursery policies.
- Birthday Party for Jesus—Have an "after Christmas" party where children can give their gently used toys to your children's ministry or a shelter in honor of Jesus.
- Family Workday—Announce a workday for families at your church. Make a list of chores such as vacuuming, painting, gardening, or spring cleaning. Provide coffee, juice, and doughnuts. Create "To Do" and "Done" columns on a wall, and write instructions for each job on a sticky note. Post the notes on the "To Do" side. Families can choose their projects and celebrate by moving the sticky note to the "Done" column when they finish.
- "I'm Serving God" Buttons—Have kids design buttons that say, "I'm serving God!" Make the buttons by cutting out 3-inch diameter card stock circles and having kids decorate them using stickers, markers, and glitter. Use a hot glue gun (adults only) to fasten clasps (available at craft stores) on the backs. Discuss the various ways people serve in your church, then have children thank these people with a handmade button. Give every child a button, too, as you celebrate their service at church.

### **Service in the Community**

Seventy-three percent of kids believe they can make a difference in their communities. We only need to provide opportunities for children to act on this belief. Try these opportunities.

- Volunteer to read. Libraries and schools are always looking for volunteer readers. Offer to staff your public library's reading hour with families from your church, or encourage kids to help younger readers at their schools outside regular classes.
- Start a Chronicles of Narnia Club. Draw families into your church by hosting a family reading night. Let younger children "host" while older kids read. With the current interest in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, this is the perfect story to use to kick-start a new outreach.
- Be a good neighbor. Older kids can help neighbors by weeding, mowing, painting, housesitting, or pet-sitting. Preschoolers enjoy leaving flowers or handmade cards on doorsteps.
- Give something special. Encourage families to clean closets by giving gently used clothing and toys directly to less fortunate families or organizations supporting families in need.

## **Service Across the Country**

As children get older, they gain more understanding of needs outside their communities. Elementary and preteen kids love to get involved with national projects.

- **Stuff Envelopes**—Most nonprofit organizations or church denominations have regular mailings requiring hours of stuffing and labeling. Ask your church or favorite charity about their needs.
- **Pray for States**—Pick one location each month and have kids pray for the people living there and those who need to hear about Jesus. Share stories from missionaries your church supports in the regions you choose.
- **Help in Hardship**—Kids hear about needs within our country and want to help. When natural disasters occur, kids and families can get involved with well-known national relief agencies such as these.
  - o American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)) has a number of ways kids and families can gather funds or needed items during national crises. Contact your local chapter for more details.
  - o Salvation Army ([www.salvationarmy.org](http://www.salvationarmy.org)) has many ways for families with younger children to serve, including serving holiday meals, ministry to the homebound, clothing drives, bell ringing, and special needs at times of national disaster. Check with your local chapter to see how your kids can serve.
- Celebrate your kids' service on National & Global Youth Service Day ([www.ysa.org/nysd](http://www.ysa.org/nysd)) on April 21-23, 2006. Youth Service America sponsors this day to focus on youth involvement in lifelong service.

## **Service Around the World**

The world is a big place, but children better understand their impact when service projects are tangible and practical. Kids' vision and comprehension of the world expands when we involve them in hands-on, meaningful projects.

- **Blanket the World With Jesus' Love**—Operation Kid-to-Kid is one of the world's largest forces mobilizing kids to serve other kids. This project has kids work together to create blankets for children in Latin America. For more information, go to [Blankets for Children](#)
- **Prayer Aware**—When kids pray for other children, they make a deeper connection to those in need. Have kids choose a world region to learn about and pray for the children there regularly.
- **Special Operations**—Samaritan's Purse's Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes have children gather and send practical items such as school supplies and toys to kids around the world.

## HELPFUL HINTS

Use these pointers to keep your children's service projects running effectively.

- Plan ahead. Even the best-intentioned service projects can backfire if they're not properly planned. Take time to map, coordinate, staff, and evaluate every service project you sponsor. Your extra effort will pay off in the form of repeat volunteers, happy staff, and fruitful projects.
- Prepare adults. When adults have realistic expectations about children's service projects, working alongside—not over—kids is more productive and meaningful for both groups. Explain to adults that by serving with children, they're helping children learn to serve. Encourage adults to focus on the goal of mentoring kids for service—not frustrations and inconveniences.
- Be specific. Go over what's expected of children—and what isn't. Everyone—adults included—needs to know what each job involves. Be clear about behavioral expectations for children and what jobs may be beyond children's abilities.
- Give everyone a task. Kids feel valued when they're given responsibility, and they'll rise to the occasion. Structure tasks so children can do as much as they're able.
- Provide for needs. Plan for transportation, supplies, and snacks.
- Encourage kids. Help kids be excellent representatives for Jesus by encouraging them and honoring their contributions.
- Structure projects so they're age-appropriate. Younger children need more hands-on projects. Instead of a canned food drive, have younger kids deliver the collected cans to the food pantry and stack them on the empty shelves so they can tangibly see the impact of their service.

## **SERVICE RESOURCES FOR PRESCHOOLERS TO PRETEENS**

Check out these excellent service resources for ideas, tools, and inspiration.

- **55 Ways to Earn Money for Missions**—Practical projects kids of all ages can do to raise money for missions. \$1; Gospel Publishing House; 800-641-4310; [www.gospelpublishing.com](http://www.gospelpublishing.com)
- **Give-It-Away Crafts for Kids**—52 projects kids can make in 15 minutes to touch the lives of family, church, and community friends. \$16.99; Group Publishing, Inc.; 800-447-1070; [www.group.com](http://www.group.com)
- **The Great KidMission**—This manual helps get children excited about service and outreach at home and around the world. \$19.99; Gospel Light; 800-446-7735; [www.gospellight.com](http://www.gospellight.com)
- **Just Give**—Secular stories about kids who've made a difference for other kids. Available at [www.justgive.org/html/kidscorner/inspiringkids.html](http://www.justgive.org/html/kidscorner/inspiringkids.html)
- **KidZkaN.org**—This Web site and free monthly newsletter are designed to help parents and teachers promote service and local and global outreach for kids of all ages. KidZ At Heart International
- **Service Projects Preschoolers Can Do**—44 service projects that preschoolers (or kids of any age) can do to serve God, their families, church, community, and the world. \$16.99; Group Publishing, Inc.; 800-447-1070; [www.group.com](http://www.group.com)
- **T.H.U.M.B. Prayer Cards**—This acronym helps remind kids to pray for peoples without the gospel (Tribal, Hindu, Unreligious, Muslim, and Buddhist). \$3; NavPress; 800-366-7788; [www.navpress.com](http://www.navpress.com)
- **When Children Pray: Teaching Your Kids to Pray With Power**—Practical helps and encouraging stories that help parents teach kids of all ages to pray. \$12.99; Multnomah Publishers, Inc.; (541) 549-1144; [www.multnomahbooks.com](http://www.multnomahbooks.com)

## **SERVING MAKES KIDS DIFFERENT**

Kids benefit from serving others. [Children for Children](#), a nonprofit organization promoting hands on volunteerism and giving for kids, identifies several benefits children reap when they serve. They learn traits such as responsibility, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-respect, selfdiscipline, self-motivation, and tolerance. When we teach a child to serve, we're also teaching that child to become a servant for life because children who serve become adults who serve. Consider these statistics from Engaging Youth in Lifelong Service (Independent Sector)

- Adults who volunteered as children give more money and volunteer more time than adults who began serving later in life.
- Two-thirds of adult volunteers began serving as children.
- Those who volunteer as children are twice as likely to volunteer as those who don't.
- Across incomes and age groups, those who volunteered as children give and volunteer more than those who didn't.
- Those who volunteered as youth and whose parents volunteered became the most generous adults when it comes to giving their time.