

NEWSLETTER

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KEEPING KIDS OUT OF TROUBLE

My husband works at a soup kitchen feeding the homeless and the poor. Quite often a judge orders a teen to help serve the hungry by working there. Such community service is in lieu of possible jail or juvenile detention time.

Why wait until a kid gets into trouble? Parents can find ways to both prevent juvenile mis-behaviors and promote what used to be called good citizenship in their children.

I can think of four ways to keep kids out of trouble:

1) Introduce your children to COMMUNITY SERVICE long before a judge may have to do so.

Many children today are what I call over-privileged. They are lucky enough to have parents who provide all the necessities of life plus most of the luxuries. They live in affluent communities, go to schools that actually teach, and all of their friends are in the same well-off group. They may be able to define the word "poverty" but they have no first-hand knowledge about it and don't know anybody who lives in poverty.

Parents can start early to teach their children how fortunate they are and that not all children are as lucky. In my family the children gave a toy to a needy child at least twice a year: Christmas and the child's birthday. Young children can accompany you when you make a donation to the food bank or when you are raising money for a worthy cause. Encourage your children to participate in school projects to help others. Let your kids see that your involvement in community activities is a source of pride to you.

Older children can start a drive for clothing or blankets for the homeless. Teens can serve as volunteers in nursing homes or shelters.

You may have to drive them to their community work or make suggestions as to what they can do but that's a parenting job that really can pay off downstream when you realize you have raised a socially aware kid who cares what happens to those less fortunate.

2) A life-long commitment to CHARITY can begin early. The rule in our house was that part of the allowance must go to charity. The children

could choose which charity with our guidance and we usually added to their contribution. You can teach your children how to rate charities according to the percent spent on administrative costs.

3) Believe it or not CHORES can help keep your kids out of trouble. Much better for a youth to feel, "I am important around this house. I am needed to help out. My work is valued." than to feel, "I can do what I want when I want to—somebody else will clean up after me." I bet the judge is more likely to have to deal with the spoiled kid not the one who helps out and feels valued.

4) COMMUNICATION about your values and how to achieve a just society can help your children learn to think about others less fortunate. Talk about the homeless around the dinner table. Ask your kids what it would be like to be hungry or homeless. Ask them what they can think of to help solve the problems of poverty. I bet the judge is less likely to see those kids who talk about something other than the latest video game.