



How to Build Character through Community Service, by Dr. Brad Schwall

Schools often participate in community service projects at this time of the year. Community service is one form of citizenship. Through volunteer work, we can develop the character strengths of social responsibility and teamwork. We put into practice the values of working to make an impact on society and collaborating with others to improve communities.

Community service gives us the opportunity to:

- Learn about needs in society
- Serve others without any benefit to ourselves
- Learn about planning and leadership
- Develop citizenship

Abuse, poverty, and hunger create stress in the lives of children that has a variety of consequences. Stress leads to absences from school, impaired attention, depression, deficits in social skills, and reduced motivation. Parents and students can work in their own communities and their larger communities to improve living conditions or provide helpful resources or offer encouragement.

How to Serve the Community

Get children involved in serving by guiding them and empowering them to plan service projects. Follow these steps as you plan:

- Think: what is the need?
- Brainstorm: what can we do?
- Set a Goal: what do we want to do?
- Plan: how will we achieve the goal?
- Act: put the plan into action
- Evaluate: did we achieve our goal?

It's important to help our children think about others, be aware and respectful of differences, yet, also understand the similarities among all children. Serving our community is about helping others, rather than believing that our experiences or status are superior. Serving is about recognizing that we all face struggles, that we all need care and kindness, and that we all have responsibility for making our communities better, safer, healthier places to learn and live.