

# An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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## 14 Little Ways to Encourage Kindness

### Happy to Help

Great thinkers from Martin Luther King Jr. to the Dalai Lama to my daughter, Addison, all have had something to say about the importance of helping others. The civil-rights leader stated, "Life's most persistent and nagging question is 'What are you doing for others?'" The soft-spoken spiritual leader called doing good deeds "our prime purpose." And my 12-year-old put it this way: "Helping feels good because it's nice for the other person and for you."

Smart words. And as it turns out, kids are actually hardwired to be considerate and kind. "The desire to help is innate," says David Schonfeld, MD, director of developmental and behavioural paediatrics at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. And their sense of doing good develops as they grow. "At first, children like to help others because it helps them get what they want. Next, they do so because they get praise. Finally, they begin to anticipate the needs of others, and it becomes intrinsically rewarding to do nice things for people in their lives."

Bottom line: Kids want to help. And as parents, it's our job to nurture and guide a child's natural inclination to pitch in so it becomes a lifelong habit. "It's important to be a good role model -- children learn to be helpful from watching you," says Dr. Schonfeld. Try out a few of these simple ways to nudge your kid's helping gene.

### Work as a Team...Make helping a family affair

When a friend gets sick or a local family falls on hard times, grown-ups know what to do. They send flowers, bake casseroles, and pass the collection plate at church. Get your kids involved in these projects. Ask them what they'd like to do to help out, or suggest arranging the bouquet, layering noodles in the lasagna pan, or collecting cans of food. And when you drive over to deliver the gifts, take your kids along. They'll find out firsthand how good it feels to brighten someone's day. This is also a great opportunity to talk about being on the other side of the good-karma equation -- ask them whether they remember when someone did something nice for them and how it made them feel.

### Share the wealth

Teach your kids to see the abundance all around them and to think of people to share it with. When your rosebush explodes in bloom, invite your child to snip a few buds and take them to her teachers. Is his shelf overflowing with books? Suggest he donate a box to the library or a local family shelter. Package up leftover soup or cinnamon rolls, and take them to an elderly neighbour.

### Hug a Tree...Teach respect for the Earth

Never litter. Even if something drops by mistake, make a point to pick it up. And if you see an old newspaper or a used coffee cup left on a park bench, throw it away. It feels good to take care of a mess you didn't make and weren't "supposed" to clean up.

### Recycle

How's this for a double whammy of doing good? Have your child collect and take empty cans and bottles to a recycling center that pays you for what you bring in, then drop the money you make into the donation jar at the supermarket checkout.

### The Art of Pitching In...Assign chores

Kids should understand that a certain amount of helping is requested and required "just because": just because they're members of the family, just because they live under the same roof, and just because it's the right thing to do. So show them where the cat food is and how to clear the dinner table and make their beds. And keep a chore chart to track and reward the completion of their tasks. Your kids will feel great pride in doing their share.

### Teach teamwork

How often have you hosted a playdate and been left with what looks like a scene from the movie *Twister*: dolls and their tiny clothes strewn everywhere, glue and glitter splattered on tables and rugs, juice cups and crumbs all over? When your child is a guest, make sure she helps clean up before she climbs into the minivan. If the host insists it's not necessary, say, "Let us pick up three things and then we'll be on our way." Putting away a few army men or Legos is a great way to practice the art of pitching in.

### Perform small acts of kindness

I have a friend who'd had breast cancer. I asked her, "What was the nicest thing anyone did for you when you were sick?" She told me that the mother of one of her daughter's friends packed lunches

for her little girl for the entire month after the surgery. This simple gesture meant my friend could take the time to recuperate minus one daily chore. Plus, her daughter enjoyed some new tasty treats in her lunch box.

### Look on the Bright Side...Give your kids rose-colored glasses

Sometimes, it can seem as if bad news is all around us. Point out to your kids the good things that are happening and the good people who are helping others. Cut out newspaper articles about student groups who volunteered to build homes or collect clothes after a natural disaster. This makes your kids feel better about the world they live in and also gets them thinking creatively about ways they can make a difference.

### Don't criticize their efforts

Yes, you can get the wet towels off the floor faster, sort the laundry better, and pour the milk without spilling it, but if you take over (or critique too much) it leaves your little helpers feeling inept, unskilled -- and less likely to offer their services again. If you're impatient, you can turn a teachable moment into a missed opportunity. "Kids want to help cook dinner, wash the car, and do the dishes, and, sure, they'll do it slowly and imperfectly at first," says Dr. Schonfeld. You're teaching them that they can make a difference at home. Just imagine how good they'll feel when they step out into the world.

### Do Unto Others...Lighten someone's load

Send your child out to meet the mail carrier on the sidewalk before he or she has to climb your steps or walk up the driveway. Offer a fellow grocery shopper help to the car with her bags. Let someone with less stuff go ahead of you in line at the supermarket.

### Cheer up a stranger (or a friend)

If you see that your neighbour's newspaper is always getting soaked by the sprinklers, toss it onto her porch. If the guy who drives your bus has been gone for a few days, ask him how he's feeling when he returns. Is a friend sad? Give her a hug. Teaching your kids to notice what's going on in the lives of folks in their own backyard fosters empathy and can inspire them to become keen helpers.

### Do something that's above & beyond the call of duty

If your neighbours have lost a pet, call and ask whether they've found their furry friend. If they haven't, you and your child can offer to hang up more signs and keep an eye out for their pal.

### Give thanks

Compliment a stranger on her great sweater, say "good morning" to a neighbour, and thank the pizza delivery guy. Sometimes a simple acknowledgment or expression of appreciation is all the boost someone needs to get through the day.

### Be a good neighbour

My family lives in an area that was built in the 1940s as a place where returning WWII veterans could buy a first home, settle down, and start a family. Today, many of the houses are still occupied by their original owner, typically an elderly widow. On our street, there are five such women, and a neat thing has happened. Without anyone's suggesting it, the immediate neighbours of each of these ladies have taken to rolling their garbage cans in and out of their garage and to the curb and back every Monday (trash day on our street). We recently joined the ranks of the Croydon Avenue trash-can brigade when the husband of our elderly neighbour passed away. The Monday morning after the funeral, Travis, my 10-year-old, said, "Maybe we should get Ann's cans too." And so now we do. There's probably a group that needs help or a problem to be solved in your own neighbourhood. So the next time you see something awry, don't complain. Look at it as an opportunity to get involved. Inspire your kids to find ways to make their corner of the world a brighter place.

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## Stop Bullying

### Warning Signs

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying—either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.

It is important to talk with children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other

issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

### Signs a Child is Being Bullied

Look for changes in the child. However, be aware that not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs.

Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewellery
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviours such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

If you know someone in serious distress or danger, don't ignore the problem.

### Signs a Child is Bullying Others

Kids may be bullying others if they:

- Get into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Are increasingly aggressive
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blame others for their problems
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity

### Why don't kids ask for help?

Statistics from the 2008–2009 School Crime Supplement show that an adult was notified in only about a third of bullying cases. Kids don't tell adults for many reasons:

Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Kids may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.

Kids may fear backlash from the kid who bullied them.

Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.

Kids who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.

Kids may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect kids from bullying, and kids can fear losing this support.

*For more information, go to: [stopbully.gov](http://stopbully.gov)*

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## Does Homework Cause Stress in Children?

Children today experience a much faster pace than children experienced even a few generations ago. One of the most commonly cited stressors for children is homework, but does homework cause stress in children or are we just babying them? If homework is a stressor, how can parents help their children handle it?

### Does Homework Cause Stress in Children?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is – yes.

The age where homework starts to stress children out is becoming lower; some children even reporting concerning levels of stress due to homework in early elementary school!

There are many reasons for this trend, but one of the most common one is the amount of information children are expected to learn is increasing in complexity, and the rate they are expected to learn it is either remain the same or decreasing.

For elementary schools, the shortened recess time puts more pressure on children without allowing them the time to work out their energy and digest what they have learned. This increased pressure is brought home and makes completing homework assignments a difficult task and very stressful for children.

Middle and high schools continue the tough academic pressures. Larger class sizes, shorter break times and strong pressures to perform well on standardized tests all place students under large amounts of stress.

**All of these factors make completing homework assignments a dubious task.**

In this setting a student who has questions on various parts of the lesson will have a much harder time getting that personal attention to answer their question, which in turn leads to hours of frustration while trying to complete the homework assignment or an incomplete homework.

## What Does Research Say?

According to research conducted by Education scholar, Denise Pope, excessive homework is definitely associated with increase in stress levels. **In addition, Pope found that excessive homework creates a lack of balance in children's lives and can cause various health problems like headaches, ulcers, sleep deprivation and weight loss to name a few.**

Homework today which can on some days exceed 3 to 4 hours can negatively affect a child's sleep cycle. Instead of getting 8 to 9 hours of sleep which is recommended, children end up getting 5 to 6 hours of sleep which in itself contributes to increase in stress.

Add to this the fact that more homework equates less time spent outside playing or in other words, low physical activity which again leads to accumulation of stress in the body.

It's no wonder that more than half the students surveyed in the study done by 'Denise Pope' cited homework to be a primary stressor in their lives.

**Another research indicates that students miss out on developing important life skills and their social life suffers as they don't find time to pursue hobbies they enjoy, for outdoor activities or to even meet friends or family.**

This cuts down on the student's creativity and readies their mind up for mechanical work.

Research done by Duke University psychology professor, Harris Cooper indicates that there also is a positive side to homework. **His study found that students who did homework did better in school in terms of academic achievements.** In addition to that, he also found that homework tends to increase positive traits like self discipline, inquisitiveness, positive attitude towards schooling and independent problem solving skills.

But along with the positives, Cooper also found a host of negatives associated with excessive homework. These included physical and mental fatigue, lack of leisure time and generation of negative attitudes towards learning.

### How Can Parents Help?

Parents don't have to just sit on the sideline and watch their children deal with the stress of homework.

One of the best things parents can do for their children is listen to them and ask questions without judging the answer. **Many children are afraid to admit to feeling overwhelmed with homework because they feel like they will be treated as if they are lazy failures.**

While every parent wants their child to achieve to the best of their ability, it is important to be willing to reduce those pressures if your child beings to act overwhelmed in homework.

Understanding that your child is stressed by homework doesn't mean that you have to allow them to not try. Often times homework causes stress because they don't understand a certain concept.

### Find out what about the homework causes your child stress.

Perhaps it is the amount, or perhaps it the content, whatever it is, you cannot help if you don't try to understand.

**While many children do well with less organized extra-curricular activities, it is very important to maintain one or two to keep balance in their lives.** Instead of dropping all other activities to focus on homework, it would be more beneficial to help your child enhance their time management skills.

**Work with your child to create a schedule for getting homework done on time.** Review the plan every few weeks to make any appropriate modifications.

Thankfully more schools are working to regulate the amount of homework given to help ease the stresses it causes on students.

However there will always be children who feel highly stressed by homework. For any child who feels stressed from homework, work with them to discover the root reason behind all their stress and work with them to handle it in a healthy manner.

*~By Emily Cordz*

*<http://www.outofstress.com/homework-and-stress/>*

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### Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous:	780-424-5900
<a href="http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org">www.alcoholics-anonymous.org</a>	
Al-Anon/Alateen:	780-433-1818
Support Network / Referral Line:	211
Distress Line:	780-482-4357
Cocaine Anonymous:	780-425-2715

### Informative Links:

**The National Women's Health Information Center:**  
<http://4woman.gov>

### How to Discipline Toddlers

<https://childmind.org/article/how-discipline-toddlers/>