



# You're Never Too Young to Start Giving

BY S. KAY  
BELL

**Children are much more compassionate than we tend to think. Parents, channel those good intentions and teach your kids important money lessons at the same time.**

Psychologists and financial experts say our attitudes about earning, investing, saving and spending money are formed early, primarily by observing how our families deal with finances.

You can add another money component to a child's fiscal mindset by teaching your youngster about philanthropy.

In today's world, it's not hard to find an opportunity to talk to your child about giving. Any parent who has watched news accounts of disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, Haiti's earthquake, the BP oil spill or flooding in Central Texas, know that these catastrophes also weigh on the minds of their kids.

Youngsters seem to intuitively know that a way to cope with such bad situations is to help those suffering. That desire to help is the perfect way to introduce charitable giving to your child. But you don't have to wait for a tragedy to start.

## DISCUSS OPTIONS

Begin by talking with your child generally about the need for charitable groups. Then move on to discussions about specific nonprofit groups and check them out, online and in person, when practical.

Perhaps your son or daughter would like to donate some of his or her allowance to the religious service your family regularly attends. Does your child love animals? Consider a local shelter. If a relative or friend suffers from an illness for which there is a charitable foundation, the youngster might want to give to it.

All of these situations allow you to not only help your child learn important money lessons, but also could help deal with some associated emotional issues. Your child might be more willing to talk about his or her worries when you discuss the philanthropic efforts that can provide some help.

## LET YOUR KIDS CHOOSE

Ultimately, for anyone, regardless of age, to be committed to giving, the donor must feel a connection. So let your child make the final decision.

Be open-minded. What your child thinks is important might not be exactly what you would have chosen. As long as you've had a good discussion beforehand, you won't have to worry (too much!) about which charitable group he or she selects.

Choice is a blessing and a source of some frustration for the young woman who leads Girls Giving Grants.

Oriana Wright, now a senior at Westlake High School, helped found the offshoot of Impact Austin ([impact-austin.org](http://impact-austin.org)), through which the city's young women in grades seven through 12 can give back to the community. Each Girls Giving Grants member contributes \$100-a



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-year and then they decide upon one recipient for their pooled funds.

"I absolutely love that you get to know so much about our community, what's going on around us and meeting the needs," said Wright, who in addition to being a founding member of Girls Giving Grants is the group's president. The one downside, though, added Wright, is that there can be only one grant awarded each year.

### INTEGRATE GIVING INTO OVERALL MONEY LESSONS

While giving is indeed special, help your child learn that budgeting for philanthropy should be a routine, money-management task. Let your child's newfound generosity serve as a springboard to discuss basic budgeting.

Suggest that your child physically divide his or her allowance into saving, spending and donating pots. Separate piggybanks for each could be a way for your child to keep track of the amounts.

Also consider Mom and Dad matching philanthropic funds. This could be an initial parental grant to get the giving going, or a special match in the case of a special gift your child might want to make. Not only will it boost the donation, but it will reinforce the whole family's commitment to philanthropy.

### GET PHYSICALLY INVOLVED

Although money is important to even the very young, hands-on charity often works best. Volunteering makes the charity real and helps children empathize with those who are in need of the nonprofit's services.

Trying to find volunteer opportunities for her young daughter was what prompted Marissa C. Vogel to start Little Helping Hands. The nonprofit focuses on volunteer opportunities families with young children. The official age range for participating is 4 to 13, but "we've had children as young as 2 and as old as 17," said Vogel.

Since its beginning in 2009, more than 200 Austin families now regularly volunteer with the organization and the nonprofit partners with 25 other groups.

The group's website ([littlehelpinghands.org](http://littlehelpinghands.org)) offers an events calendar. "All activities are available to families with kids. Find something you like and sign up directly online," said Vogel, who in addition to founding the group is its executive director. When you show up, she added, Little Helping Hands volunteers will be there to help.

Regardless of whether your child's philanthropic style is hands-on or donating money, the combination of generosity and money-management skills are life lessons that will help your youngster grow into a well-rounded and fiscally responsible adult. *AW*

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