

Lifestyle Family



Deanna Wallace, the executive director of All As One, a charity based in Dubai.
Courtesy BJ Plaster

Teach kids that charity begins at home

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Teaching a small child to share is no mean feat. Teaching him to be charitable might seem next to impossible but, fortunately, compassion is something we're born with. Think about the time your preschooler offered a screaming baby a toy, or the moment your 5-year-old rushed to give you a hug when you stubbed your toe. That kind of behaviour is worth nurturing.

"Helping a child to become aware of others less fortunate than themselves can have enormous benefits for a child's growth and development," says Deanna Wallace, the executive director of All As One (www.aadubai.org), a charity based in Dubai that helps children in Sierra Leone.

"When a child learns to be unselfish, caring and kind, it will also boost their self-esteem. Once a child realises that they can make a difference in another person's life, they catch sight of the fact that they are important in this world."

Here's how to encourage your kids to care about the needs of others.

1. Be hands on

Giving money can be too much of an abstract concept for small children to grasp. Instead, get them practically involved in a charitable project. Right now, children across the GCC region are being encouraged to donate a toy for less privileged children. The campaign, launched by Tang, has seen an overwhelming response both online (www.tangdogood.com) and in malls.

If you're struggling to get your son to part with his Buzz Lightyear, you could try a different approach. Most small children love animals and simply going to see some turtles at the Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project's public enclosure at Madinat Jumeirah could be a great way to ignite interest in charities that deal with animals.

If you have school-age children, they will be able to understand the concept of child sponsorship programmes that enable disadvantaged children to go to school. In the programme offered by All As One, sponsors receive photos and regular updates about the child they are assigned to and they can also send emails and photos to the sponsored child.

2. Practise what you preach

“One of the best ways to teach is by example,” says Wallace. “Leading a charitable life and letting your children know about your humanitarian efforts will teach them what you value and why it is important. If you demonstrate that helping others can also bring great joy, not only to others but to you, too, it can be contagious. Your children will want to follow your example.”

Tricia Evans, a governor for Gulf For Good (www.gulf4good.org), agrees wholeheartedly with Wallace. “We parents are a staggeringly important role model for our kids. From about the age of 3, parents can involve their children in events that benefit people in need, such as family walkathons, tabletop sales and school charity events. Newspapers and school noticeboards are packed with ways people can get involved.”

3. Set up a spend, give and save allowance

When you start giving your child some pocket money, teach him how to divide it into three parts: for spending, saving and sharing. It helps to have three separate piggy banks, each labelled accordingly. Talk about the fact that the sharing portion is to be used for gifts for charity, explaining: “Our family believes it’s important to share our good luck with people who are less -fortunate.”

If you begin this way, then giving money to those in need will become routine. Once the “give” piggy bank starts filling up, let your child choose how he’d like to spend that money: he might want to buy lunch for a homeless person, or notebooks for a poor child. You could even offer to match whatever your child saves for charity, just as some companies offer employees matching gift programmes.

4. Put the fun into fundraising

Raising money is something young people can really get their teeth into. Gulf For Good organises exciting adventure challenges around the world, inspiring people to do something unusual. Anyone taking part raises funds, which are then donated to charities in the region where the challenge is being held. From hiking Palestine’s remote highlands in the footsteps of Ibrahim, to trekking in the Himalayan foothills, all the challenges help others. One third of sponsorship money is used to pay trip costs and two thirds is donated to the charity in the country where the challenge is being carried out. “I’m doing the G4G Alternative Inca Trail Challenge in July with my 15-year-old daughter,” says Evans. “It will be a lovely thing to do together and a powerful humanitarian experience.”

5. Follow their interests

Even if your children are cash poor, you can still encourage them to give their time. The organisation Volunteer in UAE (www.volunteerinuae.com) can match young people with a charity they would like to get involved with. Whether it’s typing up books that can be turned into Braille, handing out hot meals or painting a school, there are numerous opportunities to give back.