

insights

Helping kids feel good by doing good

by Dr. Justin Coulson



We all want our kids to feel good. Ice cream, days at the beach and play dates may bring kids joy, but once they're finished the good feeling often disappears.

These feel-good activities give kids a rush of euphoria, but leave them craving for more. This can lead to an addictive cycle known as 'the hedonic treadmill' where one cookie isn't enough. They'll need two. Maybe the next week, they'll need three.

Good deeds

Doing good, however, is the key to living a more meaningful and happier existence. The ancient Greek philosophers [Plato and Aristotle knew it was true](#), and modern [research](#) bears out the fact altruistic behaviours are associated with better wellbeing, health and longevity. In short, we feel good when we do good.

Kind Kids

Every parent wants happy kids. The easiest way to help kids attain happiness is to encourage them to be kind.

Many studies show that our kids want to be kind. They know it makes them happy! [Research](#) shows that children from as young as fourteen months want to help others achieve individual goals and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals. This desire to help is something they're born with – even that child of yours who doesn't seem to want to help anyone!

A [recent landmark study](#) showed even very young kids find helpful and kind acts to be intrinsically rewarding. Two year olds showed greater happiness when they gave treats to others, compared to when they received treats themselves.

Teaching Our Kids to Do Good

If kids want to help because it helps them feel great, it's our job to help fulfill this natural inclination by guiding them to age-appropriate opportunities to do so.

Here are 5 ways to do just that:

1. **Role model helpfulness and kindness.** Children and teenagers learn to be helpful and kind by copying the significant adults in their lives.
2. **Encourage them to perform small acts of kindness.** Being kind, giving a compliment, helping to tidy

up- these small acts are just as powerful and effective as larger tasks such as mowing the lawn for a neighbour.

3. **Make helping a family project.** Get your kids involved when you take a meal to a family who have just had a new baby, or visit a sick friend in the hospital.
4. **Be a good neighbour.** Help your kids learn to keep an eye on others, whether it is a neighbour, or a boy on their sports team. Teaching your kids to notice what's going on in the lives of people in their community promotes awareness and empathy.
5. **Be grateful.** Expressing [gratitude](#) is one of the best ways to do good. In fact, nothing can improve your life (and the life of others) like gratitude.

Doing good deeds is what makes us human. It lifts burdens from others, and lifts us by activating the joyful part of our brains. Teaching your kids to do good is the best way to help them have lasting 'feel good' feelings. Of course, they should eat cake too. Even better, share it with a friend for a lasting feel-good effect.



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