COMMUNITY HELPERS

LIFE SKILL
learning community responsibility

Why take the time to help your neighbors?
Children and adults should understand that they can have a positive effect on people in their community. When family members realize that they have a part to play in the well-being of others, it helps them feel good about themselves. This activity builds the self-esteem of family members by showing them how to get involved in helping other people.

What do we need?
community helpers worksheet; paper and pencils; calendar

How long will it take?
15 to 20 minutes for the worksheet activity; time to follow through

What do we do?
• Assemble family members and ask everyone to think about the way people affect each other. Explain that it's important for people in communities to be willing to help each other. Spend a few minutes answering these questions.
  • What kinds of things do you like other people to do for you?
  • How do you feel when other people do nice things for you?
  • Are there any people you know who would appreciate having something nice done for them?

• Explain that this activity will help family members look for things they can do to make life easier and better for other people in the community. Give some examples of things they could do:
  • Call a friend who has missed a day of school.
  • Say hello to a shy or unfriendly neighbor.
  • Visit an elderly or lonely person.
  • Many school and community organizations need volunteer help. If someone in your family would like to help a
particular group, look in the phone book for organizations that serve them. Or contact these groups that typically have information about volunteering: volunteer centers, United Way/Community Chest, the public library, the area agency on aging, the Cooperative Extension Service, and religious congregations or faith communities. Schools, PTAs or PTOs, hospitals, nursing homes, health groups (the March of Dimes, alcohol and other drug prevention groups, and cancer, lung, and heart associations), youth groups (such as 4-H and Scouts), libraries, services for the elderly, community centers, homeless shelters, recycling efforts, and religious groups all rely on volunteers.

- Pass out paper and pencils to each family member and tell them to write down (alone or with other family members) as many ways as they can think of to help others in the community. Make sure everyone knows that this is a "brainstorming" activity, which means coming up with as many ideas as possible. There's no such thing as a right or wrong suggestion. All suggestions are accepted.

- When everyone has finished writing, ask someone to be the recorder. Give that person the community helpers worksheet.

- Ask everyone to take turns reading what they've written on their lists so the recorder can put all the ideas on the worksheet. Be sure family members understand that no one should criticize or insult other people's ideas.

- As soon as all the ideas have been listed, the recorder should ask the family to help decide how to fill out the rest of the worksheet. Pay special attention to activities that family members can do together.

- After discussing all the ideas on the worksheet, decide on one or two activities to start doing as soon as possible. Use the calendar to make any adjustments in the family's schedule. Make sure the family commits only to things they know they can follow through on.
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<th>IDEAS</th>
<th>How much time would it take?</th>
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<th>How much money would it cost?</th>
<th>Who could do it?</th>
<th>Other comments</th>
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Building Family Strengths
Making Memories with Older Neighbors

Why make friends with older neighbors?

Many older people are lonely because they have lost a spouse or close friends. They also may be somewhat isolated because it’s harder for them to get out than when they were younger. When family members practice sharing with and assisting elderly people, they learn about their special needs and develop compassion for them. Every family member can derive satisfaction from the happiness he can bring to others.

What do we need?

an elderly person or elderly people who live near you (if you don’t have elderly neighbors, try visiting a retirement center); then choose from the activities in the "What do we do?" section.

How long will it take?

It varies, depending on the activity chosen.

What do we do?

• Invite your friend to go along with your family for ice cream or drop by with an ice cream cone if he can’t get out.
• Drop by now and then when you or your family are out walking or riding bikes.
• Invite your friend to your birthday party. Make sure she has a hat to wear and a horn to blow like everyone else.
• Volunteer to mow the grass, clip around lamp posts, pull weeds, or paint a mailbox.
• Mail them unexpected notes or cards: valentines, Easter cards, school pictures, New Year’s cards, etc.
• Share a tape recording of a concert, religious service, school program, or band recital. Provide a cassette player if needed.
• Ask your friend’s opinion of a paper, a poem, or a song you’ve written.
• Drop by with one or two of your friends so your elderly friend can meet them. Remember to keep visits short.
What do we do?

(continued)

- Offer to pick the cherries, sweep the driveway, wash the car, clean the windows on the outside, shake the rugs, or run an errand.
- Neighbors with disabilities sometimes need assistance. Offer to provide "eyes" for neighbors who are blind or can't see well. Volunteer to do the following:
  - Have a "read-in" once or twice a week. Suggest that your friend invite others to participate. Choose a "book of the month" that all will enjoy having read aloud.
  - Volunteer to write and mail letters or to help with correspondence involved in paying bills.
  - Give a subscription to a large-print edition of a good magazine.

Write to:
Reader's Digest Fund for the Blind
Large-Type Publication
P.O. Box 241
Mt. Morris, IL 61054

Use the following questions to evaluate this sample activity or another activity you did for “Community Helpers."

**What happened?**

- What did our family do to help others?
- How did it make each of us feel?
- How did it make the person receiving the help feel?

**What did we learn?**

- What experiences did family members have while helping others? Did they have similar experiences?
- What problems did family members encounter when helping others?
- How would family members feel if someone were helping them?
- What did family members learn about being responsible for others in your community?

**Why was this activity important?**

- Why is helping people a good way to get to know them?
- Why is it important to get to know people whose needs are different than your own?
- What contributions can be made by people with disabilities?

**What’s next?**

- What will we do differently when helping others in the future?
- Did family members learn of other needs in the community they’d like to help with?