GENEROSITY STORIES FOR KIDS

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: VARIABLE

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

As parents, we can be eager to see our young children make generous choices. But sometimes we set ourselves up for disappointment with unrealistic expectations. It's helpful to recognize that children naturally become more generous as they get older—thanks to advances in their cognitive development, perspective taking, and impulse control.

This exercise is a simple way to help guide them along that process and activate their natural instincts for kindness. Even toddlers are happier after giving rather than receiving, and children as young as preschool age understand the connection between generosity and happiness—they expect to feel happy when they share and sad when they don't. As your children grow into more generous adults, research suggests that they will have greater happiness, stronger and more trusting relationships, and improved physical health, like better blood pressure and sleep.

TIME REQUIRED

As little as 5 minutes. You can incorporate stories about generosity into your regular reading routine with your kids.

HOW TO DO IT

Parents use stories not only to entertain their kids, but also to teach a variety of lessons. Particularly for children below age seven, stories can introduce them to a concept and begin to deepen their understanding.

One skill that stories and books can help teach is generosity. To start the conversation, choose books to read with your child featuring generous characters that are people (and not animals that talk and play as if they were people). You can try books like *Thank You, Omu!*, *Biblioburro*, and *The Trees of the Dancing Goats*, or the children's librarian at your local library can help you find others.

During and after reading each book, check whether your child is understanding what the story is about. For example, ask your child comprehension questions like "What did [character] do?," "What are some other things that happened to [character] and [other characters] in the story?," and "How did [character] feel at the end when [character] shared their toys?"

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Larsen, N. E., Lee, K., & Ganea, P. A. (2017). Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote

prosocial behaviors in young children? *Developmental Science, 21*(3), e12590.

Children were read one of three stories: a story about anthropomorphic animals sharing, a story about humans sharing, or a control story about seeds. Children who were read the human story were more generous compared to the children in the other two groups.

WHY TO TRY IT

Research suggests that younger children find human stories relatable and can apply the lessons they've learned from a realistic story. The key here seems to be children's ability to make a connection between the story and their own real life. In contrast, when children read about generous animal characters, they tend not to learn from them or transfer knowledge about being generous because they treat the characters as animals rather than people just like themselves.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.