

## Help Detective

November 18, 2009



Many parents would say that kids today are self-centered, overindulged, and not very interested in the world outside of themselves. We may not realize it, but parents have been saying this for a very long time — at least as far back as Greece's golden age, when Plato and Aristotle similarly lamented the behavior of the youth of their age.

We can take comfort in the fact that our kids aren't the world's first self-centered generation — and that they can learn to be more thoughtful of others. Now, what part can we play in that learning process? Helping others is more than an action; it calls for a caring attitude, an awareness of need, and a willingness to serve others. These are all attributes that kids can develop with a little guidance — and practice.

We have many chances to encourage our kids to help others. Start when they're young: even preschoolers can be taught to offer toys to other kids or to help pick up clutter around the house. Early training lays the groundwork; as they get used to looking beyond themselves and caring about what's going on around them, they'll come to enjoy taking an active role in doing good things for others.



### When To Do It

While grocery shopping or running errands or just out and about

### What To Do

The idea behind the Help Detective is to help kids notice others in need and those who are helping them, and to begin to offer help themselves. It is best played in short stretches and in many different situations, so you expose your kids to the range of ways we all can help one another.

#### Some basic ground rules:

1. Players get one point each time they see, and point out, someone doing something helpful.
2. Rewards are good motivators for beginning learners. When they accumulate a certain amount of points - say, on a shopping trip - you can provide a small reward at the end for noticing all the ways folks helped others that day. For example:
  - You can set a goal of 5 or 10 "Help Detective" points before your kids earn a reward.
  - If you are playing with several kids, you can set up a little competition and reward the one with the most points (provide a handicap for the younger ones to level out the playing field).
  - You can set up different reward levels for things kids point out than for things they actually do for you or others.
3. If your kids become overly enthusiastic and push the limits by offering to "help you" (just for the reward) too often, or perhaps in ways that are not true to your values, take the opportunity to talk about what it looks like to truly give help - no strings attached - and according to your values.

#### Ideas to help your kids get started:

- Did you see someone holding a door open for another person? That's one point!
- Did you spot someone retrieving an item from a high shelf for someone who can't reach it? Good for one point!
- Did you see the grocery bagger help the woman with her cart out to her car?
- Did you see someone clean up a spill in the aisle?
- Did you see someone pick up an empty paper cup and put it in the garbage bin?
- Kids can also score points in the game by doing something helpful for you—such as carrying a small bag of groceries—and pointing it out.

In addition to helping kids become more aware of opportunities for helping others, this activity also encourages them to practice those small kindnesses that enrich our lives every day — and to experience the good feeling that brings, as well as the reward.

### What You Will Need

- Notebook to keep track of "helper" points
- Reward items

### Talk About It

After you complete a round of the Help Detective game, ask your kids what they learned. Was it hard to find examples of people helping others? Are there particular things they really like to do as a way to help others? Are there things they do not like to do when being asked to help others? Why?