

Teach Your Teen To Be Public-Spirited

Message To Teen: Someone who's public-spirited shows unselfish interest in and concern for the general good of the whole community, not just by talking about it, but by doing something about it.

1. There are a number of web sites that tell about teen activists around the country and the world. Visit some with your teen to see what these teens have done and what motivated them to be so public-spirited. A good site for girls is www.teenvoices.com. At www.genv.net/en-us/teams you'll find examples and information about how to begin a "Teen Venture." Also, www.freethechildren.com provides information about the largest organization of children helping children in the world—started by a 12-year-old.
2. People show public spirit in many ways: participating in community events, such as fund-raising drives and festivals, recycling, not littering, voting in elections, donating to charity, contacting elected representatives, serving on jury duty, learning about each candidate in an election before voting, running for office, serving on committees, or managing boards of community service organizations. Talk with your teen about how these different activities benefit the public and are important to participate in.
3. Do a self-check with your teen to see how public-spirited each of you is: Do you take the following actions frequently, sometimes or not at all? Keep up with the local and national news? Volunteer to help people who can't help themselves? Raise or donate money for charity? Pick up litter in the street or sidewalk when you see it? Obey the law? Vote in all the elections you can and encourage others to do the same? Find out the facts on both sides of an issue before making a decision? Are you respectful of all people, even when you don't agree with them?
4. Here's a project for you and your teen to do with some of her classmates and their parents. Meet and make a list of as many community safety problems as you can think of, for instance: dangerous intersections, school bus bullies; abandoned buildings; vandalism and damage to property; graffiti; young people hanging around on the streets; drunk and rowdy behavior; increased drug dealing, drug use, and crack houses; harassment and intimidation; noisy neighbors; litter; or abandoned cars. Pick one you think you can do something about, write down everything you know about it (causes, people concerned, people in danger, what's been done in the past, why didn't it work, anyone standing in the way of a solution, etc.), write out what you think the real problem is, list as many possible solutions as you can think of, how you should decide which solution to work on, select the best solution, list the steps you need to take to implement the solution, and get started.
5. Talk with your teen about some of the public-spirited people in your community and what's different about them. If you don't know of any, ask someone who might know—a teacher, librarian, doctor, police officer, or religious leader, for example. Then, find out more about what they've done from the library, Internet—or from the person himself—especially what got them interested in helping others.



Public-Spirited

*I will take action
to improve the
community.*

_____ August _____

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Literature/Writing

Throughout Great Britain and Europe, there are "talking" closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) which allow operators to shout at people who are behaving badly in public, littering, or breaking the law. One reason local governments believe they need CCTV is that more and more people are ignoring socially acceptable behavior. Another reason is that the technology is available, so why not make the job of catching rule-breakers easier? Discuss whether CCTV is an appropriate way of addressing the increased lack of public spirit, and then ask students to write an opinion paper about the issue.

Research

Have students research some of the youth who have demonstrated public service. For instance, Nick Graham, 17, saved the only grocery store in a small town because he wanted to make sure the town survived (visit www.youtube.com and search "The Youngest Grocer in America"). Anna Hanger, 15, and a cancer survivor, started *Anna's Angel Fund* to provide clothes and toys for sick children. Daniel Cayce, 18, comes from a family that is committed to public service. Over the past six years, he alone has delivered 30,000 pounds of baby food; 80,000 tons of furniture, clothes, shoes and household goods; 20,000 pairs of socks; 20,000 blankets; and 1,000 child safety seats. After talking about some of these teens, have your students compile a list of public service opportunities for teens in their own community, then share the list with their peers.

Media/Computer

Some classrooms have their own blogs and web sites. Now, they're adding audio or video "Podcasts" to help students study. You can find lots of examples of these homework and test prep resources by searching "studycast" on-line. After sharing these with students, have them pair up and create studycasts for the different units you will be studying throughout the year.

Social Studies

Discuss with your students what it means to be "public-spirited," emphasizing that it's one of the responsibilities of citizenship. Then have your students compile a comprehensive list of the public service groups in your community and make it available to citizens through community web sites, flyers, newspaper ads, and TV and radio announcements. The list of organizations you can get through your local government or library is a place to start. There are always many more community resources that can be added.

Math/Science

Two companies in China knowingly and illegally added melamine to ingredients that were imported to the United States for use in pet food in an attempt to increase the amount of protein in the products. As a result, there were reports of over 17,000 sick pets and about 4,000 deaths. Talk with students about this and other practices that put the welfare of the public at risk, for instance, the hormones fed to cows to increase milk production and to chickens to increase egg laying, the rush to market of drugs that are later recalled because of dangerous side-effects, the impact that food and beverage marketing has had on the health of children and teens, etc. Many experts say that complaints to offending companies do help change such practices. Ask students what they think of the conflict between profits and public safety.

Arts

Many documentaries are intended to raise awareness and inspire people for social change. Show your students several of the 10-minute documentaries created by students at the Media and Public Service Program at Tufts University (see activecitizen.tufts.edu, search "Media and Public Service," then "Student Films"). Assign students the task of creating their own documentary on a local issue that needs to be addressed. If you need information on how to make a documentary, go to www.ehow.com/how_2002129_make-a-documentary.html or some of the other resources available on-line.



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Try these additional movies and books that are developmentally appropriate for your grade level. These additional movies and books have been researched and chosen to reinforce the monthly character trait. Preview movies and books prior to using.



A Walk to Remember: Landon is cool and Jamie is not, but the two are thrown together after Landon gets into trouble and is made to do community service.



Spiderman: Despite the conflict he feels over having to give up his private life, Peter Parker's sense of duty forces him to become a hero again when the brilliant scientist Dr. Otto Octavius is deformed in an accident and becomes Dr. Octopus.



Book of the Month: *It's Your World—If You Don't Like It, Change It: Activism for Teenagers*, by Mikki Halphin: Just as the title suggests, this is a book for teens who want to speak out for what they believe in. It includes passages from teen activists who describe their efforts and challenges.



Vote for Larry: A Novel, by Janet Tashjian: After seventeen-year-old Josh Swenson became famous for his web "sermons" against commercialism, he disappeared as if dead at the end of *The Gospel According to Larry*—the first book in this series—but now he's back with his principles intact and, against all odds, he's running for President.



The Navigator, by Eoin McNamee: Owen has always been different, and not only because his father committed suicide, but he is not prepared for the knowledge that he has a mission to help the Wakeful—the custodians of time—to stop the Harsh from reversing the flow of time.



The Other Side of Truth, by Beverly Naidoo: Fourteen-year-old Sade and her brother were taken out of Nigeria where their mother was killed and their father went into hiding. They endure loneliness and fear in London where they are placed in foster care. When they learn their father is in an English detention center, Sade manages to tell her father's story on TV news. Public attention and support follow, prompting his release.

