

Caring

**Giving, service, sharing, love, helpfulness, kindness,
generosity, unselfishness, sacrifice**

“Someone’s got to go out there and love
people and show it.”

Diana, Princess of Wales

Benjamin Franklin developed the stove now called the Franklin Stove, and it’s still being manufactured today. At the time, he was offered a patent for his invention, which would have earned him a lot of money and given him a monopoly on it. But Franklin refused the patent. Instead, he published a pamphlet describing how to build the stove so blacksmiths or other clever people could make one themselves.

Reaching out to others makes life meaningful. What’s really great about this is the more you give, the more you receive. Philosopher Deepak Chopra says that when you serve others, you gain more in return. If you give good things, then good things will flow your way.

You might be thinking “Wrong! I gave ten dollars to a friend, and I’m still waiting to get it back!” It’s important to understand that when you give and share, you won’t always be paid in kind (or on time). But over the long run, you’ll attract love, respect, and generosity from others *in general*. You’ll become a magnet for positive thoughts and actions.

When you truly care for others, there are no strings attached. You don’t expect to receive anything in return for your gifts or services. You don’t give or serve grudgingly; you do it with a free and open heart, and without keeping score. You don’t let

the fear of rejection hold you back. Sometimes caring takes courage.¹

Real caring is unconditional. You don’t stop to think whether someone deserves it. And when you really love someone, you don’t worry about what’s in it for you. You don’t love your dad so he’ll raise your allowance, or your little brother so he’ll keep his hands off of your comic book collection.

Mother Teresa spent her life loving needy people in poverty-stricken countries. She saved many infants by tirelessly rubbing and stroking their weak, undernourished limbs. Human touch releases chemicals in the body which help it to thrive and grow. (How about giving your little brother a hug?)

There are many ways you can care about, share with, and serve others:

♥ With **your actions**. You might make your mother’s bed, rake leaves off the front lawn, tutor a younger child in reading, open a door for a senior citizen, or sit with someone unpopular at lunch. Spend an hour listening to a lonely person. Be helpful and kind to someone who needs a hand.

♥ With **your words**. Say kind things to and about other people. Offer advice when it’s wanted and sympathy when it’s needed. Sometimes the kindest words are those that aren’t spoken. Don’t spread gossip, rumors, or cruel stories, even if they’re true.

¹ See “Courage,” pages 71–78.

♥ **With your thoughts.** Positive thoughts and prayers can be very powerful. You can do an act of kindness for another person merely by thinking good thoughts about him or her. This is harder than it may seem at first. It's easier to tell your hand to share a candy bar with a friend than it is to tell yourself "Even though he shoots baskets better than I do, he's cool and I like him." Other people will feel the positive thoughts you send their way.

♥ **With material gifts.** Try giving mittens to the homeless, donating trees to your community, buying a shirt for your brother or chocolates for a friend. Don't limit your gifts to special occasions (charity drives, birthdays, holidays). Give when you're in the mood and when you're not. Do it just because.

Look around you, and you'll notice many opportunities to give and serve. Think about your family, other relatives, friends, people in your neighborhood, pets and animals, the environment, your community, and the world. How can you use your skills, smarts, and experiences to improve the lives of others? What can you do for your school, club, community center, place of worship, or local government? How can you help another person (or group of people) to develop, grow, and become independent?

Sometimes service involves sacrifice—giving up something you value to benefit someone else. This might be your time, your talents, your energy and muscles, your money, or even your blood.

"If every American donated five hours a week, it would equal the labor of 20 million full-time volunteers."

Whoopi Goldberg

There's a story about a little boy whose older sister was seriously injured in a car accident. She had a rare blood type—which her little brother's matched—and she needed a donor immediately. The doctor approached the boy and asked if he would donate some of his blood to his sister. The boy turned ghostly white, but he hesitated for only a moment before nodding his head in agreement. After giving blood, he looked up at his mom and asked with wide, moist eyes, "How much longer do I get to live?"



If everyone pitched in, where would all the problems go?

When you shift your attention away from your problems and focus on helping others, your own problems don't seem as serious or daunting. If you use your unique talents and abilities to work for the good of others, you'll find greater joy, inspiration, and satisfaction in your own life.

TIP: Before you can love others, you first must love yourself.

"I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love."

Mother Teresa

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

1 Your little sister never hangs up her clothes. So you decide to help by hanging them up for her. You're doing a service . . . but are you really helping your sister? Why or why not? Give other examples of times when service to others might not be helpful.

2 Your high school requires students to perform 200 hours of community service in order to graduate. What are the pros and cons of this requirement? How might it affect students' attitudes toward service?