

**TeensHealth™**  
answers & advice

Enter question or keyword here

SEARCH ►

What's New for Teens ►

Check out more topics BELOW

- Your Body
- Your Mind
- Sexual Health
- Food & Fitness
- Recipes
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Q & A
- Diseases & Conditions
- Infections
- School & Jobs
- Staying Safe
- En español




Home / [KidsHealth Home](#)

**Nemours FOUNDATION**



# Volunteering

[KidsHealth](#) > [Teens](#) > [School & Jobs](#) > [Job Info](#) > Volunteering

You've seen news reports about people who need assistance after a natural disaster or animals in need. Maybe you've walked past people who are living on the streets. Or perhaps you've watched TV programs about how lonely and isolated older people can get.

So what can you do about any of those things, you ask? The answer: You can volunteer.

Volunteering gives you an opportunity to change people's lives, including your own. If you're feeling frustrated or overwhelmed by the news of a disaster, volunteering to help can be a great way to cope. If you'd like to support a cause but can't afford to donate money, you can donate your time instead.

**★ A Good Way to Meet People**

Volunteering allows you to meet people who have similar interests. You may make new friends of the same age or of different ages. Or you may make contacts that lead to internships and future jobs.

Helping others in need is such an important part of the American way of life that many high schools require their students to spend a certain number of hours volunteering in order to graduate.

So how do you go about it?

**Find What's Right for You**

Volunteering isn't like school: Instead of having the choices made for you about where to go and what subjects to learn, you get to pick. You can choose what really interests you and who (or what) is most deserving of your time.

If you like animals, help out at a local animal shelter. Most

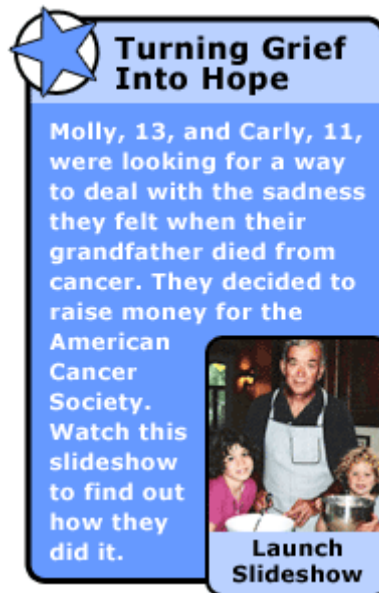
ARTICLE

MORE ARTICLES LIKE THIS

RESOURCES

shelters depend on volunteers to keep the cats and dogs happy and well exercised. (And when you're walking rescued dogs, it's not just the pooches that get a workout — you benefit too!)

If you think you may be interested in politics, volunteering to help with a campaign is a great way to find out how things work on the inside. Even if you're too young to vote, you can make a difference by helping on a political campaign — whether it's for the president of the United States or your town mayor.



**Turning Grief Into Hope**

Molly, 13, and Carly, 11, were looking for a way to deal with the sadness they felt when their grandfather died from cancer. They decided to raise money for the American Cancer Society. Watch this slideshow to find out how they did it.

Launch Slideshow

If you have a friend or relative who has or had a medical problem (like cancer, HIV, or diabetes, for example), you might be inspired to donate your time to help an organization that raises money for research, delivers meals, or offers other help to people with the illness.

If you like children, there are tons of volunteering opportunities — from being a Big Brother or Big Sister to helping out in an after-school sports program.

You also can:

- serve food at a homeless shelter
- volunteer to spend time at a retirement community
- help out at your church or synagogue
- take part in a park cleanup day

The possibilities are endless!

And if you have more than one thing you love, you can combine the two: For example, if you love kids and are great at arts and crafts, visit your local children's hospital and offer to lead art activities for young patients.

### Find What Fits Your Schedule

After you've discovered what interests you, decide how much time you want to spend and what fits into your schedule. Most organizations want volunteers to commit to giving them a set amount of time every week or two — it varies according to the organization.

But what if school, sports, or other commitments prevent you from devoting time every week? Many large organizations (especially those related to the environment or finding cures for

diseases) have daylong activities that you can take part in once in a while. These include walkathons, bike rides, cleanup days, or building homes for those in need. Not only are these great ways to help, you can also get some exercise.

### **Expand Your Mind**

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills — from working as part of a team to setting and reaching goals. It gives you a chance to discover what kinds of things you're best at and enjoy the most. A volunteer job that you love can even help shape your ideas about your career goals.

Volunteering also can provide you with a sense of responsibility because people really depend on you. And it can help you develop a new understanding of people who are different from you — people with disabilities, people in financial distress, sick kids, or the elderly.

### **Feel Good**

Volunteering helps people feel they make a difference — that they do have the power to change things for the better. When people depend on you, it can change the way you look at yourself. You can feel proud of the goals that you've achieved for an organization — whether it's helping to organize a 10K to raise money for breast cancer or running the race itself.

Volunteering is also a great way to get a perspective on your own life. Sometimes it's easy to get consumed by worries about your grades or the fight you had with your friend or parent. And although these things are very important in their own way, sometimes it can be helpful to get some distance and think about other things. Volunteering allows you to do this. It lets you focus on others and see that your involvement in the world can be meaningful.

Finally, volunteering can help save you from being bored — it gives you a place to be where you can have a good time and keep busy.

### **Look Good**

In addition to all the other reasons for volunteering, it can look impressive on college or job applications. That's not the main reason for volunteering, of course — don't do it just to please other people or only to look good or you won't enjoy it. But volunteering does show others (and yourself!) that you are reliable enough to make a commitment and show up on schedule.

Volunteering also shows employers and colleges that you believe in making the world a better place — and that you're willing to sacrifice your time and energy to do it.

### **So Where Do I Sign Up?**

After you've decided what you're interested in and how much time you can devote, it's time to find out where you can volunteer.

You have several choices. You can search the Internet or look in your local phone book under "volunteer." You can call an organization directly and ask if they need volunteers in your area. You can ask friends or relatives for ideas and contacts or look on bulletin boards in your library or in bookstores. Click on the Resources tab on this page to get a few more ideas.

When you're calling an organization to offer your time, it's best to ask for a volunteer coordinator. Be ready to answer some questions they may ask, like:

- Why do you want to volunteer for our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- How many hours a week will you be able to volunteer?
- What are your interests?
- Do you have any special skills?
- Do you have a way to get here?

Most places will ask you to come for an interview, which is usually pretty casual — they want to talk to you face to face and if they haven't yet asked the questions above, they will do it at the interview.

Whether your interview is on the phone or in person, don't forget to ask questions of your own. Because volunteering is a two-way street, it's a good idea to think about certain issues ahead of time. You might want to ask:

- What will be expected of me if I volunteer here?
- What kind of training will I receive?
- How many other volunteers are there?
- How many hours do you expect me to volunteer each week/month?

If it's a good fit — meaning you like the organization, they like you, and you like the work — volunteering can be an incredible experience.

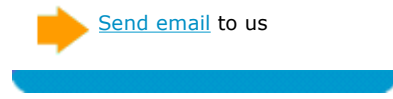
Reviewed by: Steven Dowshen, MD  
Date reviewed: September 2005



[Printer-friendly version](#)



[Email](#) this article to a friend





Sign up for FREE express email

---

[About Us](#) / [Contact Us](#) / [Partners](#) / [Editorial Policy](#) / [Privacy Policy & Terms of Use](#)



Note: All information on TeensHealth is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

©1995-2008 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.