Q: I’m already so busy. Why should I volunteer?
A: Ah, the dreaded “B” word – busy. While it is true that we feel there are already many obligations and responsibilities in life, carving out the time to volunteer can actually counter that overwhelmed and bogged-down feeling of busy-ness.

The United Nations Volunteers program describes volunteerism as “a basic expression of human relationships. It is about people’s need to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. We strongly believe that the social relationships intrinsic to volunteer work are critical to individual and community well-being.”

As humans we are wired for connection, and meaningful connections are exceptionally healing for a variety of life’s ailments. One way to improve wellness is through prosocial behavior, or volunteering. It is in those experiences that we can have a sense that we are doing good deeds (for others and for our community), building new relationships, or strengthening existing ones.

By having a support network and feeling connected to others, we feel less lonely and isolated, and stress and depression are reduced. These experiences can also help us by becoming more other-focused and bring us out of ourselves and our comfort zone.

Volunteer activities are also opportunities to learn new skills that may come in handy in the

MAKE VOLUNTEERING
A FAMILY AFFAIR

Looking for an activity your whole family will enjoy? Volunteering can be a dynamic, rewarding way to bring everyone together. Whether you’re organizing a food or clothing drive or cleaning up a street or river, volunteering as a family amplifies your impact on the cause — and gives you some quality time together. Service can get everyone thinking positively and prioritizing what’s important. Plus, you’ll make some great memories!

If giving back is already a priority for you and your family, find ways to work around challenges like age restrictions and try out some of these fun and fruitful family ideas.

WHAT’S RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Start with a family conversation so everyone can weigh in on the idea. Ask what cause or event everyone is interested in and can agree on. The more the family is amped up about a cause, the more rewarding the experience will be.

It’s challenging to juggle the work, errands, and social life of one person’s calendar, so coordinating the schedules of an entire family can seem nearly impossible! Be realistic about what you can give and when the whole family will be able to join. Check with your local volunteer options to see if weekend or evening help is needed.

“Keeping in Touch” is a monthly publication for employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer’s benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call 1-800-627-8220.
Volunteering, from Front

Volunteering together could be just what the doctor ordered for hectic family lives. It’s like hitting the pause button: You’re together and engaging with others, feeling energized – and everyone’s focused on the same goal of doing good.

Once you agree on a cause and amount of time you’re able to dedicate, you’re ready to see what’s out there!

EVERYONE’S INVITED

Get the whole family involved – children, grandparents, maybe even the dog! Everyone has something distinct to offer.

And what better way to teach your kids or grandkids about the true meaning of giving than to do it with them? If you already give your time, bring them along on your next volunteering project – or ask them what’s important to them and let them choose.

From small to large, there are countless project opportunities to connect with.

• Try searching for local ideas in your neighborhood at CreateTheGood.org.

• Many volunteer search sites give the option of searching based on whether the volunteering gig is appropriate for the whole family. Idealist.org has an “appropriate for families” filter and VolunteerMatch.org has a “Great for Kids” and a “Great for 55+” filter.

• Other volunteering sites such as Doing Good Together and Big Hearted Families are focused specifically on volunteering as a group. Big Hearted Families organizes projects by interest area, from environment-focused to helping animals.

NOT OLD ENOUGH? NOT A PROBLEM!

Many places like shelters, halfway houses or other groups may have age restrictions on who can come help. Don’t let that stop you and your young ones from doing good.

If you want to help serve food with the kids at a homeless shelter and there’s an age restriction, ask the shelter what your options are.

Chances are there’s still a way to give back. For example, some shelters may allow you to make food in bulk at home ahead of time and drop it off. This lets even the little ones get in on the volunteering action.

Children can also get involved – and learn the value of volunteering – at an early age by donating toys, books and school supplies they’ve outgrown. Talk with them about what it means to give away their old things and how another child’s life could be improved. Then, actively engage them in organizing a book, toy or school supply drive. You’ll be surprised by just how much project management the kids have in them!

Counselor Corner, from Front

workplace when looking for ways to grow or receive promotions.

These activities are also chances to improve family relations if you do it together, and to teach children about kindness, service, and altruism. These cornerstones – family and children – are essential in positively impacting our health and wellbeing, and in working toward prevention of things like bullying, mental illness, suicide, addiction, etc.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a wonderful example of this! Research shows that the connections made in BBBS between volunteer mentors and children has positive outcomes for those children facing adversity and fosters resilience. Trust me, the mentors benefit just as well from these meaningful connections.

My hope is that this column inspires you to at least consider some volunteer opportunities in the course of your lifetime. Maybe it is something more long-term like becoming a mentor for BBBS, something short-term like helping build a home with Habitat for Humanity, or a one-time commitment like helping a food bank for a day.

The opportunities are endless, and the rewards we receive are wonderful.

MORE VOLUNTEER IDEAS

• Don’t want to leave Spot behind? Look for opportunities to volunteer with and for your furry friends!

• Can’t find anything out there you like? Take the reins and kick start your own project! Organize a drive and have your family host the drop-off location or commute around town to pick up from various donators.

• Feeling crunched for time? Helping can start small and add up: Start a fund jar in your house for all the loose change lying around. Label it with a cause that you and your family support, and have the kids count it every week or month. Then take them along when you donate it, so they can see exactly who they’re helping.

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