



## IS YOUR TEENAGER BORED? How About Volunteering!

Many teenagers and young adults have a considerable amount of spare time, particularly in the summer and during school breaks. As a parent, you should encourage your child to take advantage of these times by exploring a new interest, planning for the future, pursuing a hobby or skill, or by volunteering time for a worthwhile endeavor. Although it is not frequently considered as an option for many adolescents, volunteering can give your child the opportunity to develop interests, challenge capabilities, and identify new strengths and talents.

You may wish to speak to your teenager about the reasons that people volunteer their time. Volunteering provides teenagers many opportunities.

### LEARN ABOUT AN ORGANIZATION OR ACTIVITY OF INTEREST.

Getting involved with an organization like Special Olympics International will expose your child to a year-round sports training and athletic competition designed for children and adults with special needs. Volunteer activities could include such tasks as athletic training, fund raising, administrative help, and competition planning.

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## VACATION TRAVEL SAFETY

Enjoy your vacation by playing it safe. Even though you are taking some time off from work, remember not to take time off from safety. Here are some points to consider before you go and while you are away:

### SECURING YOUR HOME

- Make sure your home is secure before leaving for vacation
- Keep shades and blinds in their normal position
- Arrange for someone to pick up your mail/newspapers
- Make sure all doors and windows are locked
- Activate home alarm
- Make sure to turn off all gas pilots and water faucets
- Set timer to turn lights on and off or have someone check your house periodically
- Arrange to have grass mowed or snow shoveled while you are away

### PACKING YOUR BAGS

- Take only the essential credit cards; plan to use credit cards or travelers checks as opposed to cash
- Pack as light as possible; cumbersome bags will slow you down, making you more vulnerable to getting robbed
- Pack in inconspicuous bags, as designer bags can draw unneeded attention
- Keep valuables and medication in carry-on baggage

### WHILE YOU ARE OUT AND ABOUT

- Don't display jewelry, cameras, or other expensive items
- Check maps before you go so you can tour confidently
- Stay in well-lit, well-traveled areas
- Always lock your car when parked
- Travel together, and keep an eye on children

US Department of Health and Human Services. Vacation travel safety. Retrieved January 3, 2014, from <http://www.foh.dhhs.gov/library/library.asp>



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### GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE.

Homeless shelters are located in most cities and welcome volunteers to assist with meal preparation, organizing a food drive, or working behind the scenes in the business office. Spending a few hours at a senior citizen's center will help him or her become more sensitive to elder challenges and issues.

### BEAT BOREDOM.

Teenagers can reshelve books at the local library. They can care for abandoned dogs and cats at a local animal shelter. Many state parks offer volunteer programs where teenagers can be involved in educational programs, trail construction, or grounds maintenance. If your teen is skilled at creating or maintaining Web sites, many smaller charities and organizations would be very grateful for assistance in this area. Your child could also help by raising money to pay for the Web site, as funds are limited for these organizations.

### OVERCOME A LOSS.

Perhaps a best friend moved away, or a romantic breakup occurred. Or, even worse, your child may be grieving over a relative or friend who died. One of the best ways to overcome the feelings of pain and loss is to help other people. Staying busy and keeping his or her mind focused on others allows your child to deal with, and heal from, the void that has been created.

### HELP OTHERS.

Volunteers at a local Ronald McDonald House prepare meals, do household tasks, and visit with the families of seriously ill children. Habitat for Humanity groups build and provide housing for economically disadvantaged people. The Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) literacy programs are always in need of volunteers who can motivate children and tutor them in reading.

To locate organizations or associations that can assist you in finding volunteer opportunities, contact:

- Local city government offices
- The local Chamber of Commerce
- The local Community Center or Community Service office
- Local community colleges and universities
- Local hospitals
- The United Way
- The Salvation Army
- Your place of worship
- The local newspaper
- The local police or fire department
- The local veterinarian
- Local radio or television stations
- The local Parks and Recreations office
- The Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC)
- The local YMCA/YWCA
- The Boys and Girls Club
- The local mentoring program or Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America
- The state or county Employment Development Department
- The local high school career center
- Amusement parks, local festivals, or fairs
- Political campaigns (during an election year)
- An 800 number phone bank

One of the most difficult parts of volunteering can be finding a situation that best fits the personality of your teenager, but it is worth the effort. Volunteering teaches children a lot about themselves and about others, and they will meet some interesting people in the process. Your teenager will really help him- or herself as he or she is helping others.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2013). Is your teenager bored? How about volunteering? Raleigh, NC: Author.



## MAKING THE MOST OF SMALL TALK

It's very easy to minimize the importance of small talk. To the people who are good at initiating casual conversations and connecting with others, it's second nature and automatically part of life. But to the rest of us, social situations and one-on-one encounters can leave us feeling completely ill-equipped. Let's face it: The ability to meet and greet and make people comfortable does make a big difference. Why? Because we live in a land of first impressions and we don't always get a second chance. So even if "expert chitchat" isn't on the top of your resume, here are some ways of handling a challenge that could open doors.

### NAMES COME FIRST.

It might sound obvious, but it's rule number one: the simplest way to approach someone is to introduce yourself by name. Forget about coming up with a witty opener. Stick with "Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_", or if you're in a formal mood, "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_." Whatever the occasion or greeting is, start by putting your name out there. This is true even if you've met the person before or are pretty sure he or she knows who you are. Don't assume. Reintroduce yourself. It never hurts.

Your second step is to get the other person's name. Again, this may strike you as a no-brainer, but it's the little things that slip our minds when we're uncomfortable—which is why people can forget to offer their name in response to an introduction. So if a prompt is necessary, go ahead with "And you are?"

After learning the person's name, repeat it out loud. This trick is pretty much guaranteed to help you remember names. If you can, try to fit the name into the conversation later to reinforce it.

### LOOKS DO COUNT.

We're not talking physical appearance here; we're talking eye contact and the awareness of physicality. It's essential that you look the other person in the eye while talking. This doesn't mean staring; it means directly facing them, engaging their focus, and staying connected—not allowing your eyes to wander off mid-sentence or roam around the room when listening.

Also, a firm handshake should generally accompany an introduction for both men and women. In most cases, the physical act can start to break down psychological barriers. Then, during the conversation, make yourself available by giving the other person your full attention. Stay aware of your own body language, and pick up clues from his or hers.

### IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

OK. This is really the number one small talk rule: Don't talk so much as listen. As much as you're able, let the other person do the talking by asking questions. When given encouragement, most people are quite willing to share information about themselves and express their opinions. So rather than bringing up topics that allow you to impress someone with your expertise, turn it around.

Find out about their interests, likes, dislikes, and experiences. Ask questions that are open-ended and lead to other questions. When you discover common ground and start to tell the story about the time when you got in trouble as a kid—catch yourself. Keep your contribution short and sweet, and bring it back to them.

Of course, this works a lot better if you're genuinely interested. But more often than not people are genuinely interesting, especially when they feel appreciated. Listening, really listening, not just biding time and scanning the room for someone better to talk to, takes practice, but it's a skill worth developing.

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## MAKING THE MOST OF SMALL TALK

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### KEEP THINGS LIGHT.

When venturing into a group of strangers or meeting someone for the first time, many people dread the prospect of small talk or dismiss it as meaningless and boring. “Why waste my time?” is a question on some serious minds (along with “What am I going to talk about?”). But small talk does have a purpose in our society. Keeping things light and casual actually gives us more information about who someone is and how they live their lives than intense debates which are burdened by the weight of the world’s problems.

Talk about the weather, entertainment, books, current events, sports, hobbies, or what you love and hate about your jobs. Compliment the other person if the compliment is sincere, and not inappropriate for the situation. Why not offer to buy someone a cup of coffee? It’s common courtesy. Stay positive, be yourself, and remember to smile.

Are there forbidden topics when it comes to small talk? Probably. As a general guide, avoid talking about religion, politics, marriage, divorce, or sex when you’re just getting to know someone, whether on a personal or professional basis. But there are always exceptions. To judge each situation, pay attention to whether the other person seems comfortable with your discussion; you never want anyone to be embarrassed about what they’ve shared with you. And if you find the conversation becoming emotionally charged during a strictly social interaction, change the subject.

### IS THAT IT?

Even if things are going well, and you wish you could go on talking forever, let the other person decide how long the conversation lasts. Look for signals from his or her body language; listen to his or her choice of words and when it’s time make a graceful exit. Remember that by definition, small talk is just that: a short chat.

Why, then, put so much time and energy into mastering the fine art of small talk? Because “Why bother?” chatter often marks the beginning of a significant relationship. You never know who might become an important part of your life or what conversations will later seem pivotal. Becoming adept at that bothersome little thing called small talk can be an investment that truly pays off.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2013). Making the most of small talk. Raleigh, NC.





## HELPING PARENTS GET READY FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Summer is a time when routines and schedules go out the window, days are usually carefree, and bedtimes are pushed back. But those relaxing days can make transitioning back to school difficult for both parents and students. With some advance planning, however, the switch from summer to fall doesn't have to hurt quite as much. Here are some tips for going back to school.

- **Set sleep habits.** Ease the transition back to early mornings by implementing a bedtime. Getting enough sleep is important for school performance. If your child stays up late in the summer, start setting back the bedtime in small increments until it's back where you want it. Setting it back slowly will make early school hours easier to handle.
- **Establish a study space.** Create a specific place in the house for students to do homework, whether it's at the kitchen table or in their room, and make

sure there's plenty of light and that it's free from distractions. Set a consistent time for them to work, before dinner or right after school, so it becomes part of their daily routine.

- **Stay healthy.** Kids tend to be more active in the summer. You can keep those habits going during the school year by adding physical activity to family time. Instead of watching TV or playing video games after dinner, try a sunset stroll. Maybe even sign up and train for a charity walk. It's also important to pack a healthy lunch filled with protein, fruits, vegetables, and water.
- **Schedule help.** Before the year begins, figure out who will drop off and pick up your child each day, and keep a calendar to remind yourself of after-school activities and special events. If your child needs help with homework or school projects, set aside library time or sign up for after-school tutoring. And be sure to keep an open dialogue with your child's teacher so there won't be any surprises about work expectations.
- **Spend less.** Buying new clothes and school supplies can be stressful on your budget. You can save money by recycling certain supplies. Hunt for deals online, where you can find discounted prices on everything from uniforms to lined paper.

USA.gov Blog. (Reviewed 2013, August 16). Helping parents get ready for back-to-school. Retrieved September 11, 2013, from <http://blog.usa.gov>

