

Teen Volunteers

Why are Teen Volunteers a good idea?

- Young children look up to teenagers. ↔ Teenagers like to be admired.
- Young children like to do creative crafty projects. ↔ Teenagers secretly like to do creative crafty projects.
- Young children need responsible role models. ↔ Teenagers can be great role models with some coaching.
- Teens will soon be voters. Make the library important to them!
- Teen volunteers may come back as adult volunteers one day.
- Teens need community service hours for high school, the National Honor Society, and their college résumés.
- This is a great project for your teen advisory board, and teen volunteers can serve as a type of teen advisory board if you don't have one already.
- Giving teens schedules and responsibilities will increase attendance, especially among the busy high school students.
- This could be a way to recruit new library users.
- Giving teens a voice in programming will give them a sense of ownership and respect toward the library and its staff.
- Teens are full of new ideas and are endlessly creative. Some are artists, musicians, crafters, and have fun hobbies they could share and/or teach.
- Older children will aspire to be volunteers one day.
- Parents like to see teens helping children.
- Active, helpful teens are a much better library statement than bored and unruly teens.
- The community appreciates seeing continuity of service. Show the community that service doesn't stop once kids outgrow the children's room.
- Teens need to prepare for the real world. Applying to be a volunteer is a good first step to getting a job.
- Teens are an important population that may be underserved.
- You'll be serving the teens and the children at the same time.

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Training

- Require training for all new volunteers. Have them make nametags and then go over policies and procedures.
- Policies should include expectations and repercussions for things like tardiness, poor physical appearance, and socializing with friends.
- Policies should also include who they can go to in case of a problem, and reassurance that they will never be left alone with children.
- Emphasize that they are unpaid employees and represent the library and the staff.
- Have teens sign a policy agreement.
- Give them a copy of the storm closing policy and a list of people they would need to contact in case of emergency.
- Take them on a tour of the library, and introduce them to staff. Make sure to tell them where to check in when they come to work.
- Show them the staff areas and where you hide your craft supplies. They'll feel important.
- Talk about the schedule procedure. Schedules could be on paper or online. Make sure they know where to look and who will be responsible for keeping track of their hours.
- Go over tips on how to work with children and their parents. Think about the things you do automatically. Ask your coworkers for their suggestions.
 - a. Kneel down or crouch when talking to small children.
 - b. Always greet the child first.
 - c. Smile.
 - d. Encourage creativity with the children and be complimentary.
 - e. Recognize individual creations and discourage competition.
 - f. Don't try to figure out what the child is creating (you may be wrong), so compliment a specific element such as color, material, or perspective instead.
 - g. If someone has a meltdown or if a parent disappears, go to the nearest staff member.
 - h. Be open to suggestions. Kids have great ideas and will think of great new things.
 - i. Stay calm at all times.

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Scheduling

- Think about which programs you need help running. Crafts and LEGO programs are great places to start. They're simple and offer great flexibility.
- Consider how many volunteers would be helpful and limit participation.
- Make sure teens know that they are responsible for keeping track of their schedules.
- If you can, include the program list with the application so that teens know what programs are available.
- Make sure that teens know that signing up to help with a program is a commitment.
- Reinforce policies for cancelations. One week should be enough for you to find another volunteer.
- Give them several contacts in case something comes up. You may not be there when they need to change their schedule or cancel at the last minute.
- Schedule a party for the volunteers, something simple that recognizes their hard work. Try splitting up the year into sessions like summer, fall, and winter/spring. Then you can schedule parties in August, December, and May.
- If teens miss the training and want to participate, let them know when the next training will be. For example, at the beginning of each session in September, January, and June.
- Make sure to keep track of volunteer hours for state statistics reports. Decide if you will keep track of hours for the teens or if they will be responsible for doing that.
- Set up an e-mail list to contact teens with spontaneous volunteer projects like craft preparation or event set-up. Send out reminders.

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Tips

- Make sure teens feel like part of the team.
- Be honest with them. If a program doesn't go well, be up front about it.
- If a volunteer is struggling, pull him/her aside and try to help. Start with the positive and move from there to constructive advice.
- Follow through with policies. Teens won't take you seriously unless you follow through with the repercussions.
- Try to use their suggestions and feedback. They may have ideas on schedules, activities, music, or brand-new programs.
- Ask them about their hobbies. Maybe they can help start a new program for children or even for other teens.
- Give them credit where credit is due. Brag to the director, the Friends of the Library, and the trustees.
- Tell them how much you appreciate them. Clean up time is a great opportunity to do this.
- Ask teens about their interests (the application is a good place to start).
- Do you have any teens interested in LEGOs? Have them help you start a LEGO club.
- Are any of them into Harry Potter, Star Wars, or Percy Jackson? They can help you throw a big party for the children. Have them come up with activity ideas, trivia, and decorations. Then assign them stations and have a big event.
- Are any of your volunteers in a band? Maybe they could start a battle of the bands program or have a summer concert.
- Do any of them have skills with paint, duct tape, or percussion instruments? Encourage them start a workshop for children.
- Try soliciting for teens with specific skills. For example: "Looking for teens who do fancy nail art! Apply to volunteer and you could help run a Spa Day!"
- Brainstorm ideas for a holiday party—Halloween, Chinese New Year, and Diwali are all great excuses for a fun party.
- Do you have artistic volunteers? Have them make new signs or art for the library.
- Let teens raid your supply closet and come up with a "leftover craft."
- Teach your very best volunteers to run programs.
 - Train them to do pajama storytime or a storytelling program.
 - Have them help younger children with homework.
 - Invite your most technically savvy teens to help parents with computer problems, train people to use their e-readers, etc.
 - Start a book buddy program where teens read one-on-one with children.
- Ask them about teen programming. They can help connect you to other teens and create good programs.
- Ask them about volunteer recruiting. What do they think makes a good volunteer? Do they have suggestions for the application process?

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Troubleshooting

- Try not to take on too many volunteers per event. You don't want bored volunteers.
- Don't allow teens to dictate their own schedule until you know them and their work habits. Instead, give them time slots or events that work for you and have them sign up. Once they've proved themselves, more flexibility can be earned.
- Give yourself a break. If no children show up for an event, have some fun with your volunteers! It's still a program. Pull out a deck of cards or some trivia and make it a teen event.
- Let the teens bond with each other, but remind them why they're there.
- If you feel your teens are immature, try raising the age requirement.
- Too many applicants? Try asking for recommendation letters, do interviews, or implement a probation period.
- Are teens being forced to volunteer? Give them an out. Offer to talk to their parents. Volunteers who would rather be somewhere else are not helpful.
- Be protective of your teens. You are ultimately responsible for them.
- Remind teens of your teen programs when they come in to volunteer.
- Try not to bend over backward for teens who leave their required volunteer hours to the last minute. Remember the hard work that your trained volunteers had to put in.
- Talk to the high school about when community service hours are due and remind volunteers to get those forms to you in a timely fashion.
- Try to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and assign tasks accordingly. Just because a teen is shy doesn't mean s/he isn't good with children.
- Model behavior for them. Show them how you'd like them to interact with children and parents.