



5 Fast Facts

About Contribution During Adolescence

Throughout adolescence, we become increasingly capable of contributing to those around us in deeper, more meaningful ways than when we were younger. Opportunities to not only contribute but to reflect on the meaning of our contributions are important to healthy development during our adolescent years. Following are facts about contributing during adolescence:

1 Brain and social development in adolescence increase our ability and our willingness to contribute to others.

The network in our brain that activates in social interactions matures rapidly during our adolescent years, deepening our understanding of the complex feelings, perspectives, and needs of other people. In addition, brain regions associated with our sensitivity to rewards become more reactive, increasing the positive feelings we get from [kind and helpful behaviors](#).

2 Our environments play a role in encouraging contribution.

For example, young people from families where contributing is a particular value, such as those from [some ethnic and immigrant communities](#), seem to feel more of a sense of reward when helping. Being marginalized as a result of our race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion can also [motivate us toward a sense of purpose](#) to help others in our families, schools, or communities.

3 Programs that provide a chance to make meaningful contributions and to reflect on those contributions can support mental and even physical health.

Sports-based community service and mentorship programs can [strengthen our prosocial values](#) and [promote our wellbeing](#) during adolescence while increasing physical activity. Even volunteer activities that don't involve physical activity may have [physical health benefits](#). The opportunity to [reflect on the experience](#) through journaling, art, essay writing, or group discussion might be essential to ensuring positive effects on academic, personal, and social outcomes.

4 We can make different types of contributions in the different contexts of our lives.

For example, youth can provide emotional support to peers by making them laugh or being a shoulder to cry on. In families, young people can do chores, help siblings, and participate in family decision making. At school, students can be active in student government, clubs, or sports teams. Youth can work with organizations like 4-H or Boys and Girls Clubs of America that guide activities that make a difference in their communities.

5 As adults, we need to make sure those opportunities to make meaningful contributions and to have those contributions recognized are available to all young people.

Whether youth are contributing to a noteworthy social cause or helping a grandparent or sibling at home, giving to others supports positive development for adolescents and also benefits friends, family members, social groups, and communities.

For more research-based information about the role of parents and other caring adults in adolescence, visit developingadolescent.org/core-science-of-adolescence/meaning-purpose-through-contribution.