

# Ten Ways to Teach Kids about Earth Day

## Reduce Consumption When Possible

By Diane Peters

<http://holidays.kaboose.com/earth-day/earth-day-recycle-reuse.html>

Think a child or a family can't make a difference? Not so. Little things -- like using a colorful cloth bag, or tossing potato peels and eggshells into the compost heap-- can help the environment. And if your child develops good habits now, they'll endure as he grows.

Here are 10 ways you can encourage your kids to go green during [Earth Day](#).

### **Reduce electricity**

Explain to your children that lights, computers, televisions and furnaces use energy, and that energy is in short supply. Jessica Altman of Buffalo, NY, encourages her 3-year-old to always flip off the light when she leaves a room and shut off the TV when she's no longer watching. Now the toddler even reminds others: "Turn off the light!"

Appliances like DVD players use energy even when off, so cutting the power totally is the only way to conserve. Go shopping together to buy power bars and plug your electronics into them (watch little ones closely so there are no shocks).

### **Take small steps**

There are dozens of small things your kids can do every day to save energy and keep the world cleaner and greener. Your kids can:

- Shut off the water when they brush their teeth
- Walk, ride a bike or take the bus instead of traveling by car
- Take faster showers or baths in just a small amount of water
- Help hang clothes on the line instead of putting them in the dryer
- Choose products that are not over packaged

### **Recycle**

Explain to your kids that every bottle and can they use is waste that just sits in a big pile at the local dump if we don't recycle. Get them involved by making it their job to sort recyclables and take them out for pickup. (Remind them to watch out for broken glass and ask for help if this happens.) If there's no recycling collection in your area, find out where you can drop off items.

### **Compost**

It's easy to collect your own food scraps and garden waste and turn it into healthy compost in your own yard. Children can help buy a composter (they're sold at home reno stores and sometimes through municipalities), and, like Altman's young daughter, fill it with kitchen scraps and garden waste on a daily basis and even help stir it to get things breaking down. And, in a few months when you've got compost, they can take part in spreading it over the garden and seeing how "garbage" can become rich dark dirt to make a garden grow.

### **Do a donation tour**

A great way to get across the message of "reuse" and "recycle" is to take kids on a trip to your local thrift store, recycling center, or church. If your children have old clothing, toys, shoes, or other items in reusable condition, make a family trip down to the donation center so they can see how their trash is someone else's treasure. Teach kids how items can be reused for different purposes--for example old towels, blankets, and comforters can often

be donated to local animal shelters for bedding. These real-life examples will teach kids that many items they would normally throw away can actually have a second life.

### **Write a letter**

Fifteen years ago, 9-year-old Melissa Poe of Nashville saw a TV show about pollution. Horrified by the problem, she wrote a letter to the president that suggested he “get on TV and put up big signs” to make people aware of the problem. She also founded [Kids FACE](#), an environmental organization for young people. Your children can write letters to government leaders and corporations about pollution and other environmental issues, and you can give them a hand in looking up addresses and help them decide what they’re going to write. Talk about how you live in a democracy and every voice counts, no matter how small.

### **Make a reusable bag**

One of the first projects Poe and her friends did as part of Kids FACE was to make fun bags for grocery shopping. Plastic shopping bags are a big garbage problem -- it takes 1,000 years for a bag to break down! Here’s how: Have your kids help you choose some heavy fabric and sew it into simple rectangular bags with handles. Or, buy some canvas bags at a craft or environmentally friendly gift shop. Then use fabric pens to draw pictures on them. (Check out our [Canvas Grocery Tote](#) bag craft for detailed instructions.) Take the bags out with you every time you shop.

### **Do a project**

If your child has an independent research project coming up at school, suggest she tackle an environmental issue like pollution, garbage or energy. Check out these resources:

[Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Kids Club](#)

[Environment Canada Kids](#)

[DMOZ Open Directory Project](#) (which organizes research sources)

### **Enjoy the earth**

Kids have to love the world to want to protect it. So take nature walks and look at the trees, flowers and sky. When you’re away on vacation, don’t forget to enjoy the local natural environment, not just the tourist sites. Encourage them to take pictures, draw pictures, [read books](#) and write stories about the world and its beauty.

### **Talk about it**

“We focus on just being aware,” says Altman. She often talks to her daughter about birds, plants, gas-guzzling vehicles and energy use. Indeed, just asking your children to shut off the lights and reuse plastic bags is not enough -- they must understand why we’re doing these things and what impact they might have.