Environmental Cleanup

With all the everyday life lessons to keep track of (look both ways before crossing, wash your hands, etc.) it's hard to think about the big topics, such as refining your child's environmental consciousness. Sometimes taking matters into your own hands is the best way to set an example for your child.

Have you ever seen an environmental eyesore and said, "Somebody ought to do something about that"? Well, that's what Kelly Stettner said of the junk in the river near her home in Springfield, Vermont. Her husband's reply: "Well, you're somebody."

Stettner, the mother of a 1-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter, says this poke in the ribs prompted her to form the Black River Action Team in 2000, a group of environmentally-conscious citizens who organize clean-



ups of the river every year. "Everybody can be a Somebody, and that's the foundational philosophy of the BRAT," she says.

How can you show your child how to be a Somebody in your community? Stettner recommends finding out if an organization is already working on a specific river or stream in your area by going to the Environmental Protection Society's watershed website. "These organizations are usually very happy to hear from interested people!"

If there isn't a clean-up effort already underway near you, here's a guide to starting a project from scratch.

What You Need:

- Work gloves
- Trash bags
- Camera for taking lots of photos of volunteers getting down and dirty
- Safety waiver ("While this won't protect you in the event someone sues you, it will help people get in the mind-set that they may encounter safety issues and should act responsibly," Stettner says)
- Safety posters (photos of poison ivy & other noxious plants, warnings to leave heavy or sharp objects to be picked up later, etc.)
- Basic first-aid kit
- Shovel and separate bucket for sharp stuff like fishing lures, broken glass, etc...
- Map of the area to be cleaned. Stettner's choice: www.topozone.com

What You Do:

- 1. Almost everything you'll need can be requested from local businesses as in-kind donations. Find an umbrella organization to handle tax-deductible questions, like your larger Watershed Council or city government.
- 2. Recruit help by contacting newspapers with fun press releases asking for volunteers, or contact your child's school to arrange a community service project for students. Get in touch with local Girl Scouts and Boy Scout Troops, 4-H, teen centers and other youth groups.
- 3. Sponsor a weekend river-cleanup for your child's friends and their parents, and follow it up with a pizza party.
- 4. Form a relationship with your local Recycling Center or Transfer Station. "Go to the transfer station when it's not crazy-busy, find out the person in charge, and introduce yourself and your project.

- Make sure you find out what the station accepts and what they don't and how they'd like a delivery to be handled," Stettner says.
- 5. Write a follow-up press release to thank your donors and volunteers, report on all the junk you removed from the water, and schedule future clean-up dates.
- 6. To get started, you can scout out the best clean-up areas ahead of time, so that you can get a general idea of what you'll be picking up to run by the dump staff.
- 7. Start near your local shopping center. It's a hot spot for rogue shopping carts, stuff people clean out of their car and fast food litter.
- 8. Set up a headquarters table where you can sign people in, hand out gloves and bags, offer refreshments and display a large map of the area. This is also the place to record inventory when folks come back with the trash.
- 9. If the junk is more than half-buried, leave it. Disturbing junk that is embedded in the river could cause the bank to collapse. That half-buried car frame might be better cut by a mechanic's shop and only part of it hauled away.
- 10. So, that's all well and good. The real question is how you convince your child that climbing into the river to pick out trash is a good idea. Stettner gives these tips:
 - o Focus on the idea of getting wet and dirty.
 - Stay fun and positive. Keep the focus on how great the river will be when you're done, not on pointing a finger at the 'culprits' you think are responsible for junking up the river.
 - Tell them it's a treasure hunt to find the weirdest piece of trash, the most cans, or the oldest item.
 - Look for flowers, plants, trees and wildlife to identify on the trip
 - For older kids, a paddle trip can accompany the trash cleanup: bring along a couple of trash bags and gather litter from the banks and the bed of the river as you canoe or kayak.
- 11. Stettner says the annual clean-up project teaches children in her community about the concept of stewardship. "I want them to know it's our river, our community and our responsibility," she says. So, if you're serious about teaching your child environmental responsibility, grab your gloves and lead the way!
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