

Talking Peace: A Vision for the Next Generation

Each of us has unique interests, skills, and talents, and it is when we act from our hearts, with our minds, through our hands that we are most satisfied and effective. Choose one issue that interests you, figure out how much time you want to devote, and get involved. If you like talking, maybe you can work on a teen hot line. If you like to write, perhaps you can create a community news column for your school paper. If you like to be physically active, perhaps you can get involved in a building project for the homeless. If no organized activities in your neighborhood appeal to you, recruit some friends and start a committee of your own!

Here are a few ideas that are more specific.

Conflict

- Ask one of your teachers to set aside part of the classroom for a conflict board. Put up a world map and, with other students, monitor conflicts that are going on around the world. If you can't find enough coverage of the situations that interest you on television or in the papers, write to the Carter Center and let us know.

Food, Shelter, and Health

- Find out if there are any soup kitchens or homeless shelters in your area. Recruit other volunteers to help you organize a food, clothing, or toy drive. Perhaps an extracurricular group, like a chorus, sports team, or band, could sponsor the event.

Environment

- Does your family recycle? Do your neighbors? Your parents' offices? Your school? If any of these groups don't, help them start a program.
- At the library, figure out where your gas and electric power come from and where the garbage that is collected from your family goes. If you can, visit the utility and recycling companies and the landfills. Do you agree with the way your community's natural resources are being used? Is unnecessary pollution occurring? Write your local political leaders and tell them what you think.
- Take a look at the empty lots in your neighborhood. With permission from the owners and some volunteer work, they can be cleaned up and divided into family garden plots for flowers or vegetables, or perhaps furnished with some homemade playground equipment.

Human Rights

- Amnesty International and many other human rights organizations welcome young members. Ask your librarian for the address or phone number of the chapters near you.
- If you hear about human rights abuses in this country or far away, write your national congressional representatives and/or the president and ask them to take action.



Mediation

- Talk to guidance counselors or teachers about starting a student mediation team in your school. With their help or the help of an outside professional, you can learn how to understand the causes of conflict and work toward fair and unanimous solutions. Use these new skills at school, at home, and in your neighborhood.

Elections

- If you are interested in politics, find out how the candidates stand on the issues you care about by calling the local office of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or the League of Women Voters. Volunteer for the campaign of someone you trust, and you may be surprised by the responsibilities you are given to handle.
- If there are problems in your school you'd like to address, run for student government or manage someone else's campaign. If the election results are reached fairly, accept them with good grace whether you win or lose.

Cities

- Become a big brother or sister to an underprivileged child in your neighborhood. If no organized program exists, ask a teacher, guidance counselor, or church leader to help you start one.
- Ask drug enforcement officials or other police officers to visit your class and give you the facts about drugs and gangs in your area. Ask them what steps you can take to protect yourself from drug-related violence.

