



8 moving ways to make Veterans Day meaningful for kids



(BPT) - Her grandfather fought in World War II, her father in Vietnam and her college boyfriend in Desert Storm. Her best friend of 30 years was a Navy recruiter. Yet when Vivian Wall's two young children asked why they should care about Veterans Day, she was unsure how to communicate its significance.

"It's so important to honor our veterans and all they've sacrificed in service to our country," Wall says. "But what's the best way to make children understand that? How do you talk to them about war and national security without confusing them or even frightening them?"

There are 20.2 million veterans living in the U.S. today, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). The majority are older than age 60, according to statistics from the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#). Since 1954, Americans have honored veterans on Veterans Day, Nov. 11 – a date that also commemorates the ending of the first World War in the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – Nov. 11, 1918.

"Celebration and support are key elements of Veterans Day," says Jim Blaylock, president of [Military Order of the Purple Heart Service Foundation](#). Blaylock, a Vietnam veteran, earned three Purple Hearts and lost his right hand and forearm from his time in the service. "Veterans need and deserve our emotional, physical, education and financial support, so it's important for children to understand why we honor veterans with a special day."

Blaylock and the volunteers who support the Purple Heart organization offer some suggestions for how families can observe Veterans Day in ways that will be meaningful for children:

- * Contact your [local branch of the Veterans Affairs department](#) about what programs might be available for your family to participate in. For example, a veteran's hospital may have a visitor's program for veterans undergoing care, or a local cemetery may have a program that encourages children to place American flags on veterans' graves.
- * Talk to children about veterans you may know personally. Invite a veteran for dinner on Veterans Day and encourage kids to talk to him or her about what the day means to veterans. With more than 20 million veterans in the country, chances are someone you know has military service.
- * Encourage children to save money throughout the year and on Veterans Day make a cash donation to an organization that supports veterans, such as the [Military Order of the Purple Heart Service Foundation](#).
- * Watch an age-appropriate war movie with tweens and teenagers and explain to them what was happening in the real world during the time period in which the movie is set. Classic movies tend to be less violent and may be OK for younger kids, while tweens may relate to less intense movies like "War Horse" or "Memphis Belle."
- * Children love medals, and whether they've received a school, sports or scouting award, their medal creates an opportunity to discuss this significant way we honor veterans. Talk to kids about the importance of medals. If your family frequents yard sales or flea markets, encourage kids to be on the lookout for military medals. Often, the original medal recipients or their families have been unintentionally parted from the medals, and would welcome their return. Organizations like [Purple Hearts Reunited](#) help return medals to those for whom they have the greatest meaning.
- * Attend a ceremony or parade. Kids love parades and watching a Veterans Day parade as a family allows you to illustrate the importance of support and gratitude for veterans.
- * Help children make something to be donated to a veteran's organization. Support organizations often seek donations of care packages. Children can also make cards, baked goods and even knitted items to be given to local veterans.
- * Kids and dogs go together like peanut butter and jelly. Consider getting your family involved with an organization that provides service animals for wounded veterans, such as [PatriotPaws](#). The organization has opportunities for volunteers and families that want to raise a puppy.

"Every year, we try to find a new way to honor our veterans," Wall says. "But the one thing we do every year that is most meaningful to us is to just call the veterans in our family and tell them how much we love them and appreciate their service."

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