

Activity: Journaling

Use For: Reflection

Time: Varies

Materials: Writing materials and journal

Description

Part One: Youth use journaling to record thoughts and feelings before and after volunteering.

Part Two: They compare their entries and discuss the differences.

Participant Objectives

- Increase self-awareness through recorded reflection
- Learn how expectations can differ from results
- Identify ways in which volunteering has changed their perspective
- Gain a better understanding of what volunteering means to them

Procedure, Part One

Hand out journals; providing something other than a school notebook will encourage youth to write. Depending on the group, the journaling itself can be carried out either in the individual's own time or in a group setting. Keep in mind that in order to be effective participants must be focused and centered. The environment should be quiet with no distractions.

Explain to participants that the point of the journaling is to be completely honest. Make it clear to that no one will have to share what has been written unless they want to. They should write whatever they truly think or feel and not worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Journaling methods include free writing, writing letters and guided imagery.

Depending on the age of the participants, asking just a couple of very basic prompting questions may be helpful. Remind them that the entry can be as long or short as they choose. To prompt deeper thought, ask them to reflect in silence on these questions:

- How do you feel about the volunteer activity you are about to take part in?
- What do you expect it to be like?
- What do you want to learn?
- What can you reflect on during this activity?
- Who is going to benefit?

As soon after the activity as possible, have participants write another entry, again describing how they feel and focusing on what they just did. If this is a class, it can be pre-set as a homework assignment. Encourage the group to write their entries that

night. If this is not possible they will need to do it in the next group meeting. Again, create a focused atmosphere. If the activity is ongoing, have them keep an ongoing journal and check in with them periodically. If participants become less motivated during an ongoing process, remind them again that entries do not have to be long and can be in a variety of forms.

Procedure, Part Two

The next time the group meets, ask if anyone would be willing to share excerpts from their journal. Start with entries that were made before the activity. Draw two columns on the flip chart and in the first write down any words that describe how participants were feeling or what they were expecting. Repeat the exercise using excerpts from after the activity, this time recording words in the second column. If youth are reluctant to share, have them call out single adjectives that they wrote, such as fun, nervous, surprised, welcomed, etc.

Look at the two columns and ask the group what they notice. Is there a difference in the two columns? Or are they both a mixture? Ask if anyone felt like their experience was different from what they expected. Facilitate a discussion about why this is. Include:

- What were you expecting?
- Is that what happened?
- If not, where do you think that expectation came from?
- What actually happened?
- Was it fun?
- Was it difficult? If so, how did you deal with it?
- What did you learn about yourself/about other people?
- What would you do differently next time?