

Class Volunteering Project – Compassion

EXPLANATION:

When schools strengthen relationships with community-based organizations, they engage in environments that positively impact students’ awareness and experiences. Volunteering can make students feel more confident and connected to people. This activity encourages students to create a plan to volunteer and support a local cause—and in doing so, demonstrate compassion.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–10

STUDENT GROUPING: Whole-class planning and engagement

ACTIVITY LENGTH: Single volunteering event or an ongoing project

CASEL CORE COMPETENCY: *SOCIAL AWARENESS*

- Taking others’ perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- You can learn more about the CASEL framework [here](#)

SCOPE OF TASK:

Compassion is defined as a sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. It is the desire to help someone who is in distress or need. Compassion is a feeling and an act, and the best way to teach it is to put it into action. Compassion involves kindness, generosity, sensitivity, and understanding.

Note: Depending on the focus of the project (and, of course, school policy), this volunteering activity can be:

- A “one-off,” short-term action or an ongoing commitment
- On-site or off-site

Volunteering gives students a way to:

- Develop social skills (compassion, collaboration, leadership, critical reflection, and communication)
- Find their purpose and help others
- Connect with people in their community
- Increase their self-understanding, awareness, independence, and confidence

This project will require the approval of both school leadership and parents.

Scoping and enacting of the volunteering project will need to be a shared concept. Additionally, health and safety policies and other guidelines will need to be considered and addressed prior to this activity.

1. With the whole class, activate the students' prior knowledge of compassion:

- What is compassion?
- Who has experienced compassion?
- Can/would you share these experiences?
- Do you know of, or have you heard of, other such acts of compassion?
- Can you describe any of these?

2. Discuss with the group the concept of how volunteering can be considered an act of compassion.

3. Brainstorm with the students what they would need to consider before they examine possible options to engage as a class in a volunteering project. Record on the board the criteria the students identified for reference purposes. Suggested points to be considered:

- Organization goals
- Engagement expectations
- Logistics for engagement
- Students' skills, knowledge, interests, and experiences
- Resources students would need: materials, facilities, transport
- Level of commitment: short-term or long-term
- Location: on-site or off-site activity



4. With reference to the criteria developed, ask the students for suggested volunteering activities. Examples of volunteering activities:

- Assisting at animal shelters (feeding, washing, or walking animals)
- Reading to local kindergarten students
- Visiting nursing homes to interact with residents
- Conducting a blanket or food drive for homeless people
- Preparing care packages for disadvantaged overseas communities
- Sponsoring a child, which would need an additional plan for ways of supporting this ongoing commitment

5. An alternative approach is to suggest that the students scope out setting up their own plan for developing a volunteering project based on a perceived local, state, or national need. These types of projects can lead to increased ownership of the project and can relate, for example, to a current catastrophe.

6. Once the project has been selected, organizational plans have been made, and the project is up and running, it is important that ongoing actions include:

- Regular meetings with students to reflect on engagement and experiences
- Discussions about the acts of compassion they have observed and the opportunity to express how such acts made them feel
- Regular communication with families to keep them involved and supportive

RESOURCES:

April is National Volunteer Month in the United States, with one week designated as National Volunteer Week. This may be a good opportunity to help students get involved in local volunteering opportunities.

See the Points of Light organization for more information about volunteering in the United States:

<https://www.pointsoflight.org/>