

Class volunteering project — Compassion

EXPLANATION:

When schools strengthen relationships with community-based organisations they engage in environments positively impacting on 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.

YEAR LEVELS: Years 7–10

STUDENT GROUPING: Whole class planning and engagement

ACTIVITY LENGTH: Single volunteering event or an on-going project

LINK TO CURRICULUM:

Health and Physical Education: Sequence of content F-10

Strand: Personal, social and community health

Valuing diversity

- Investigate the benefits to individuals and communities of valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Critique behaviours and contextual factors that influence health and wellbeing of diverse communities.

See also Personal and Social Capability learning continuum sub elements

- Communicate effectively
- Work collaboratively
- Recognise emotions
- Recognise personal qualities and achievements.

There are educational links to English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Health and Physical Education.

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

- a 'one-off', short term action or an on-going commitment
- on-site or off-site.

Volunteering gives students a way to:

- develop social skills (compassion, collaboration, leadership, critical reflection, communication)
- find their purpose and help others
- connect with people in their community
- increase their self-understanding and 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 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 examined possible options to engage as a class in a volunteering project. Record on the whiteboard the criteria the students identified for reference purposes. Suggested points to be considered:
 - Organisation goals
 - Engagement expectations
 - Logistics for engagement
 - Their skills, knowledge, interests and experiences
 - Resources they would need — materials, facilities, transport
 - Level of commitment — short-term, long-term
 - On-site or off-site activity.



4. With reference to the criteria developed, ask the students for suggested volunteering activities. Examples of volunteering activities:
 - Animal shelters (feeding, washing or walking animals)
 - Reading to local kindergarten students
 - Visiting aged care homes to interact with residents
 - Blanket or food drive for the homeless
 - Preparing care packages for disadvantaged overseas communities
 - Supporting and assisting at Anzac Day services
 - Sponsorship of a child — which would need an additional plan for ways of supporting this on-going commitment.
5. An alternative approach is to suggest that the students scope setting up their own plan for developing a volunteering project based on a perceived local, state-wide or Australia-wide 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 made and the project is up and running, it is important that on-going actions include:
 - Regular meetings with students to reflect on engagement and experiences
 - Discussions about the acts of compassion they have observed/can identify and how they made them feel
 - Regular communication with families to keep them involved and supportive.

RESOURCES:

More information about volunteering:

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/australian-curriculum/>

There is also a National Volunteer Week in Australia. It is an annual celebration to acknowledge the generous contribution of our nation's volunteers.