

ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING

The BIG DECISIONS™ Curriculum includes 6 lessons to assist facilitators in structuring a service-learning component in the program. Service-learning lessons can be offered concurrently with the sexuality lessons, or subsequent to them.

Service-learning is an educational strategy that actively involves young people in service to their community and links their service to classroom activities. Classroom activities prepare the students for their service. In their service projects, students use their strengths, energy, and ideas to help address real community needs. An important additional component of service-learning is reflection: students reflect on their experiences in a structured fashion. Completing a service-learning project is likely to engender pride, enthusiasm, and a sense of accomplishment among students who participate.

Service-learning is a powerful youth development tool that has many positive effects on schools and communities, as well as on students. Students in service-learning programs are less likely to engage in a variety of risky behaviors.¹ Of the various programs for adolescents, service-learning programs, e.g., the Teen Outreach Program, have the strongest evidence of effectiveness in preventing teen pregnancy.²

The service-learning component of BIG DECISIONS™ is designed to offer sessions with basic exercises that can be used to help students develop a service project. In real life, time with students for activities such as sexuality education or service-learning projects is often limited. The BIG DECISIONS™ service-learning lessons are designed to enable student groups to do a service-learning project in spite of limited resources and limited in-school curriculum time. Depending on time available, the exercises can be condensed to briefer class discussions, if necessary.

Projects can be developed for whole classes; this strategy is more manageable for younger students. For classes of older students, different experiences can be developed for individual students, although this requires more facilitator work and time to coordinate multiple projects and/or service sites. Because resources and transportation may be limited for many schools, projects can be designed to be completed on school grounds, or at sites within walking distance of the school.

The key job of the facilitator is to help the students choose and plan a realistic project, and to serve as a liaison with school administration and community agencies. Nevertheless, as much as possible, facilitators should encourage and allow the students themselves to develop and implement the service-learning project. For younger students, it may be appropriate for the facilitator to develop an idea or several ideas for a project with school administrators and community partners, with

¹ National Commission on Service-Learning. Learning in deed: the power of service-learning for American schools. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002.

² Kirby D, 2001, op. cit. (see footnote 5).

the students providing input on which project they prefer, and on how to do the project.

The service-learning lessons can be modified to adjust to the age and maturity of the student group. With younger groups of students, facilitators can be more directive, offering ideas and options for projects, and soliciting student feedback. Older students can be more actively involved in brainstorming project ideas and designing projects.

Planning for the service project must involve school administrators to assure that the activities are consistent with school district regulations and covered by the schools district's liability insurance. Parental consent for participation in service projects must be obtained. (A sample consent form is included in the Parent Session materials). The availability of transportation and the school policies for off-campus activities will determine if off-campus service sites can be considered.

Facilitators are encouraged to explore several service-learning resources on the web:

- The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: www.servicelearning.org.
- Learn and Serve America: www.learnandserve.org.
- National Service-Learning Partnership: www.service-learningpartnership.org
- National Service-Learning Exchange: www.nslexchange.org
- National Youth Leadership Council: www.nylc.org.