



How To Plan a Service Project With Children

Projects for children ages 6 to 12 should be appropriate for the children's concerns, skills, and levels of development. The steps below will help you organize an appropriate project. For additional information and forms, please visit our website, McGruff.org's Milstein Child Safety Center at www.mcgruff.org.

Step One: Identify the Need

Service projects should respond to a need in the community that the children feel is important. Get as much input from the children as possible when you select a project so that the children will be enthusiastic and motivated as you begin to plan.

- Brainstorm ideas—What topics are the children interested in? How could their interests or hobbies be used to help someone else? Is there a problem in their school or community that they would like to address?
- Research the issue—What is the nature of the problem? What causes it? How does it affect people in the community? Educators may wish to infuse the service project into their class curriculum.
- Decide on a project—How do the children want to address the issue? What impact do they want to make through their project?

At this stage, consider the developmental level of the children you work with to ensure that the project is meaningful for them.

Younger children (ages 6 to 8) tend to focus on the present, as opposed to the long-term. They best understand their immediate environment—their classroom and their family. As children grow, they become better able to understand abstract concepts, such as the future, and to consider people and places they have not seen. Long-term projects and those that help people from a different town, state, or country may be more appropriate for children ages 9 to 12 than for younger children.

Step Two: Plan the Project

Guide the children through the planning phase. Help them take responsibility for the project by assigning them appropriate tasks. You can assign tasks to the whole group, a small group, pairs, or an individual.

- Assess your resources—How many people will help with the project? How much time can you devote to it? What materials will you need?
- Decide when and where—When do you plan to do the project? Where will it take place? Will you need to arrange transportation to the service site? Will you need to obtain permission from parents for the children to participate?
- Build partnerships—Who else needs to be involved? Will you be working with a community organization? Is there a person or group that would be willing to advise you? Can the children work with senior citizens or high school students to plan and execute the project?



- **Raise funds**—How much will the project cost? Will you need to hold a fundraiser? Can local businesses provide their services (e.g., making copies of a flier) free or at a reduced cost? Can you apply for a grant to acquire resources?
- **Promote**—Who should know about your project? Can you post fliers in local businesses or public buildings? Would a school or community newspaper do a story on your project?

Step Three: Carry Out the Project

When the day of the service project arrives, be sure to have supplies ready and set aside enough time to complete the project. Have enough adults present to give children direction and answer questions. Make sure all participants understand their roles and responsibilities. You may want to write a schedule so that everyone is aware of arrival and start times, breaks, setup and cleanup times, etc. You may want to take pictures of the children as they work on the project.

Step Four: Reflect and Evaluate the Project

This important step helps children process what they have learned from their project.

Reflection focuses on personal growth, while evaluation looks at the impact of the project on the community. Here are some questions that may help the children organize their thoughts:

- **Reflection**—What did you learn from the experience? What were your expectations at the beginning of the project? Did the results meet those expectations? Did you discover or develop any personal skills? How did it feel to provide service to the community?
- **Evaluation**—What were the reactions of the people your project served? Did your project change the community? If so, how? What obstacles did you face as you planned your project, and how did you overcome them? What worked well? What would you do differently in the future?

Step Five: Celebrate!

Don't forget to celebrate the work the children did for the project. You may decide to have a party or present the children with certificates for their achievement. After all the work has been done, a celebration is a good way to conclude the experience.

