

The Value of Helping Others (Teens)

Objective

To identify the needs of others and show your empathy through specific acts.

You Should Know

Some adults think of teens as “self-involved,” but that reputation certainly does not apply to many teens. Many teens are very altruistic and involve themselves in all kinds of social causes, from helping out at school events to working to feed the hungry or saving the whales.

Teens can be as considerate and helpful as anyone else, but sometimes they are so stressed and pulled in so many directions that they may seem self-involved.

If you think you are not viewed as being helpful and caring, then this worksheet can help you. It is designed to help you pay more attention to the needs of others by observing at least five people and performing an act which helps them without being asked. In other words, it is designed to stimulate your empathy.

Empathy is the ability to not only see other people’s point of view but also to understand their feelings. Most people assume that everyone is born with the same capacity for empathy, but that is not really the case. Some people have a high degree of empathy and some people do not seem to have a great deal of empathy at all. Most scientists think that the degree of empathy a person has is a combination of their genetic make-up and their experience.

Teens brought up in a home where there is physical or emotional abuse, or where their parents have mental health problems like drug or alcohol abuse, may have more difficulty in feeling empathy for others. However, the more empathy and helpful behavior you express, at any age, the easier it will be to get along with family members, friends, and even teachers.

What to Do

In the next week, look for opportunities to help others. Perform at least five helpful acts for five different people which reflect your understanding of what each person needs. It could be as simple as holding a door for someone with an armful of groceries. Or it could be more time-consuming, like cleaning your room or the kitchen without being asked.

Using the form on the next page, record what you see that triggered your desire to help each person, what you actually did, and how they reacted.

You might want to make copies of this worksheet and increase your empathic behavior on an ongoing basis. If you practice this, you will likely find that you will have closer and more positive relationships with the people in your life.

Reflections on this Exercise

Did you find it difficult to pay more attention to the needs of others? How did you remind yourself to do this?

What was the most surprising reaction you got from the people you helped?

Was there anything you would have done differently?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn that might be helpful in your important relationships?
