

# Age Appropriateness in Youth Service

## Grades 6-8



The service of young people is an important resource in solving community problems. But like any volunteer, youth volunteers need to be matched with appropriate opportunities. Developing age-appropriate service activities will ensure fulfilling experiences for volunteers and agencies. Depending on the age of youth, concrete developmental features must be present to retain his or her interest and energy in service.

This resource packet includes a brief overview of the developmental themes for youth in grades 6-8, project ideas for this age group and a list of other resources.

### Developmental Themes for Youth in Grades 6-8

Everyone develops at a slightly different rate and in a slightly different way. However, general patterns can be seen within different age groups of youth. Consider these major developmental themes when designing appropriate service opportunities for youth in grades 6-8.

#### Physical Development

- Rapid physical growth and development
- Wide range of developmental differences
- Improved coordination
- High energy
- Short attention spans

#### Identity Development

- Emerging self-consciousness
- Seeking a sense of group identity
- Preoccupying themselves with appearance
  - Self-concept influenced by bodily changes
- Needing affirmation from parents, peers, adults
- Facing pressures to conform to “masculine” and “feminine” roles
- Facing self-esteem issues
- Wanting to be heard
- Wanting independence, frustrated by lack of opportunity
- Having feelings of ineptness
- Developing likes, dislikes, attitudes
- Rebelling
- Having emotional outbursts; feelings on the surface

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### Social Development

- Strong need to fit in
- Susceptible to peer pressure
  - Loyal to friends and peer group
  - View peers as behavior models
  - Enjoy team games
  - Conform to peer group standards of dress
  - Value acceptance by peer group
  - Tendency to be intolerant of those who are “different”
- Facing decisions regarding alcohol and drug use
- Learning relationship skills
- Egocentric
- Idealistic
- Self-conscious
- Need to challenge status quo and authority
- Have ability to be empathetic

### Intellectual Development

- Transition from concrete to abstract thinking
- Emergence of independent critical thinking
- Can apply logic to solve problems
- Can solve problems by considering alternatives
- Need to be allowed to make mistakes and try again
- Beginning to be aware of future and life-planning issues
- Need to look beyond self
- Value exploration
- Asserting and developing own value system
- Understands ethical abstractions (example: justice, honesty)

### Values

- Beginning to be aware of social issues
- Have desire for social action and responsibility
- Want to be socially engaged, to make a difference, to give hope

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### Matching Service Experience to the Developmental Level of the Participant

Diane Hedin's research suggests that "for optimal moral growth, students should be engaged at their own level of reasoning in experiences which will challenge them to exercise their skills in more sophisticated ways. They must not be overwhelmed with demands beyond their current level."

As young people grow from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, there are appropriate service opportunities for them at every age. Just as young people have opportunities to participate in age-appropriate athletics from Little League to varsity sports, they also can have increasingly complex service experiences as they grow up.

### Project idea starters and examples of service projects for youth in grades 6-8

- Hold a multicultural, gender-neutral, disability-aware career and life-planning fair
- Plan an intergenerational cultural exchange
- Gather oral histories from community seniors
- Get training for peer tutoring and conflict resolution
- Develop water-quality projects
- Plan and execute environmental protection awareness campaigns
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or nursing home
- Help with literacy and voter registration campaigns
- Serve on boards for nonprofits that affect youth issues
- Research disability issues
- Do a community needs-assessment survey
- Plant and maintain a community garden
- Sponsor a school-wide drive for canned food, small toiletries and clothing
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen
- Sort and pack food at a food bank
- Plan and sponsor a "dog walk" to raise money for local pet shelters
- Make or donate bird houses for parks and walking trails
- Tutor younger students after school

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### Age appropriate service activities for students grades 6-8

#### Age appropriate...

- Youth Action Councils, where they design service activities for other young people in their communities
- Helping food banks with inventory
- Participating in a community clean-up
- Volunteering at a soup kitchen, nursing home or day care center
- Starting a conflict-resolution program
- Tutoring elementary students after school
- Planting a garden at a homeless shelter

#### Not Age Appropriate...

- Self-directed and self-guided Youth Action Councils without adult supervision
- Delivering meals to homebound residents
- Building a playground in an underprivileged neighborhood
- Making placemats for soup kitchens, nursing homes or day care centers
- Starting a peer counseling program
- Tutoring youth in juvenile justice centers
- Renovating a homeless shelter

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