

Responsible Decision-Making

Lesson Title: Early Exposure to a Career

Grade Level: Middle School

Video Overview

Volunteerism has become a graduation requirement for high school students in hundreds of school districts around the country. In fact, a poll by Harris Interactive reports more teens volunteer to support a charitable cause — 56 percent — than have a part-time job — 39 percent. For some kids, volunteering also has a practical side, as well.

For years, Vishnu wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a doctor. But after volunteering at a hospital, he's not so sure. "It's kind of a battle," Vishnu says, "between me, you know, sticking to medicine, and I like medicine a lot, or trying something new." He is part of a trend among teens who volunteer in order not only to help their community, but also to choose a career. "If you want to go into medicine," Vishnu says, "you know, you can learn facts all you want, but until you're in a hospital, you won't really experience what it is like."

Teens say volunteering also teaches them respect and compassion for others. "You don't get paid, but see that's not the issue really, the issue is just helping out and you have fun while you do it."

Vishnu's father, Dr. Muthu Kuttappan says, "I think that's a very encouraging step and I hope other students follow; get first-hand knowledge of what is the real world."

Experts add that when teens volunteer they are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and are more apt to do well in school. Susan Esslinger, a hospital volunteer coordinator, sees the future value in teen volunteerism. "Hopefully when they're 40, 50, 60, 70 years old, they'll still have that sense of volunteerism in giving back to the community, whether it's at a hospital or a soup kitchen or whatever the place may be."

Discussion and Self-Reflection Questions

- The video cites benefits from volunteering to include exposure to possible career opportunities and learning respect and compassion for others. What are the other benefits volunteer experiences might provide?
- Many high schools across the country have incorporated community service hours as a graduation requirement. Do you agree with this requirement? Why or why not?
- If you have served as a volunteer, please share what the experience meant to you. Were there joys? Frustrations? What should teens do to make the most of the volunteer experience?
- What volunteer opportunities might you seek? What experience would you hope to have? What resources are available in your community to help you find a volunteer opportunity?