



Guiding Principles for Service Learning Students

Principle 1 – Show respect for others and for human dignity.

Tolerance and acceptance of both the individual person and their circumstances are important prerequisites for any helping relationship. Toronto is one of the most diverse places in the world. In addition to the obvious differences, there are also social biases related to educational attainment. As a university student you may have more formal education than others, consider that there is a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience among the people you work with. No person with whom you work should feel that they are being treated in a condescending or otherwise disrespectful manner. All contact – and information from that contact – should be conveyed with respect, privacy, and confidentiality. The exceptions to this rule are when an individual agrees that sharing with others is appropriate or if the information gained puts the individual or the community in danger.

Principle 2 – Understand your own personal biases and avoid imposing these biases on others.

You must be careful not to impose your personal biases on other people, or to attempt to influence or prejudice a person's views or beliefs. This might include criticism of others, disenchantment, or strong value judgments that ask an individual to deal with your own personal agenda. Everyone has personal opinions and biases, but they should be stated with personal ownership and without pressuring or convincing another to accept them.

Principle 3 – When in doubt – consult!

When confronted with a situation in which you are uncertain as to what to do, or you think there may be some conflict or dilemma, it is important that you consult with your community supervisor. Your supervisor, the Service Learning Office and your academic instructor can be your greatest resource and they want to help you. Remember that uncertainty is NOT a measure of incompetence!

Principle 4 – Respond within the limits of your training and skill.

When you receive requests for help that require skills beyond your training, expertise, or jurisdiction you must know your personal limits and not exceed the boundaries of your knowledge and skills by making suggestions or implying knowledge that you may be lacking. Don't play the role of expert! Saying, "I don't know", is much more helpful than faking it. You can still consult with your supervisor and/or make inquiries to find the information you need. In many cases, helping others to problem solve is even more helpful than having the answer every time!

Principle 5 – Knowing and managing your emotional response while helping another is crucial to your own well-being and to your ability to help.

Students serving in helping roles must be prepared to know how to handle and even control emotional reactions by learning to set limits, accept but not absorb emotional output, and channel reactions through referral. Occasionally, an individual's reaction may stimulate parallel feelings from your own experience. In the situation it's important to respond appropriately, but it's important to follow up and debrief with your community supervisor, the Service Learning team or your academic instructor. There's no need to 'tough it out' on your own, and it won't make you look more competent if you do so!

Principle 6 – Act within professional boundaries.

Service Learning students work with a variety of populations, including children, youth, and people their age or older. People in helping roles are in a position of trust and power, even if the person you are working with is of a similar age. It is important to maintain professional boundaries in the relationships you form through your Service Learning experience. Developing a personal relationship could compromise your helping role and should be avoided. Whether consensual or non-consensual, sexual relationships

with clients/participants are prohibited. Note too that sexual relations with a TDSB student are explicitly listed as grounds for immediate dismissal from the Service Learning Program and are reportable to Child Protection authorities if the child is under 16. It is also possible that you may feel some antagonism, dislike, or other strong negative emotional reaction to someone with whom you are working. In these cases one must consider why the aversion is being experienced and carefully assess whether these feelings will interfere with your role. If so, it is important to consult with your supervisor. Students are to use their Ryerson email only when corresponding with community partners; Use of Facebook, Hotmail, etc. is prohibited.

Principle 7 – Maintain client privacy and confidentiality as long as privacy protects the person being helped.

In an ideal world, your relationship with individual community members seeking your help is private and the nature of your helping interaction implies that you will not divulge personal information about them. This implied 'standard' protects the individual's privacy, and it also promotes a level of trust that makes self-disclosure possible. However, if you receive information that reveals a potential danger to the community member or others, you MUST consult with your community supervisor and determine an appropriate method for intervention. It is a legal obligation to report suspicions of mistreatment of persons under 16 under the The Child and Family Services Act (Section 72). You should advise your community supervisor who will know the correct procedures to follow. If you require additional support or guidance please contact the Service Learning team or your community supervisor.

Principle 8 – Take care of yourself- Service learning may take you into familiar or unfamiliar neighbourhoods, so take some time to familiarize yourself with the places you will be frequenting. Pay attention to what is happening around you. If something makes you feel uncomfortable, remove yourself from the situation or environment. If something happens that concerns you or you experience something that makes you uncomfortable and you want to debrief with someone, you should speak with someone with whom you feel comfortable. You are also encouraged to speak with the Service Learning team or your community supervisor.

Principle 9 – Take responsible action if you learn about illegal behaviour.

While there may be social norms and laws, the reasons the people do not follow them are often complex. If you hear an individual report information that may have elements of behaviour that is illegal or potentially unethical, you may enter into a dialogue about the behaviour and relevant resources in the community. Approach these conversations with respect, compassion and humility. If the information that has been shared implies a clear and present danger to others in the community, this information should be shared with your community supervisor to determine the appropriate course of action.

Principle 10 – Represent Ryerson and young people well.

Maintain integrity, avoid gossip, be accountable for your actions. If giving feedback, it should be constructive, invited and respectful. If you have a conflict, try to sort it out with the person directly. Treat others as you would like to be treated. If you don't know what to do, ask the Service Learning team or your community supervisor for guidance. Everything you learnt in kindergarten!

Principle 11 – Avoid being intrusive while learning through doing.

Service Learning students have two roles: volunteering for community partners and learning through their experience. We encourage students to use active inquiry to help with their role as a learner. It is important, however, that your learning is not intrusive for community partners or their clients. Rather than 'interviewing' people or asking pointed questions relating to reflective assignments, see what you can learn through observation and everyday conversations.

Source: Adapted from CACSL's Ethics in Helping,
<http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/documents/InformationSheets-Ethics-2007.pdf>