Community Service Activities: Developmental Benefits, and Factors in Activity Selection
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Participating in community service activities offers adolescents the chance to use their out-of-school time constructively and an opportunity to contribute to their communities. Research studies have shown that engaging in community service or volunteering can result in positive outcomes and meet the developmental needs of adolescents in several areas. These areas include:

1. **Personal and social development**: Youth who are involved in service activities are less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors. They build healthy relationships with others, and grow in their ability to relate to culturally diverse groups of people.
2. **Civic responsibility**: Service enables youth to actively contribute to their communities, and enhances their social responsibility and their citizenship skills.
3. **Academic learning**: Service develops adolescents’ academic skills and knowledge. It is also associated with increased engagement, motivation, and school attendance.
4. **Career exploration and aspirations**: Service provides opportunities for youth to become more knowledgeable about the careers they would like to choose in the future. For example, if a child works to help/save the environment s/he will have a better understanding of careers in environmental science.

Research consistently shows that adolescents are positively influenced by their parents’ own involvement in and/or encouragement towards service. Type of service activities that are available in communities or schools vary greatly, and as parents you can help your child choose service activities that are most suitable to their needs and interests. Service activities likely to result in positive youth outcomes share the following characteristics:

1. **Student choice and decision-making**: When youth have some choice in deciding what activity they would like to do, they find their involvement meaningful and enjoyable, and therefore are more likely to continue their involvement.
2. **Opportunities for autonomy and responsibility**: The service work should allow youth to work independently under adult supervision. Young people need opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, and be held responsible and accountable for their involvement.
3. **Direct contact with service recipients**: While indirect activities (e.g., organizing a food drive, preparing care packages to send to people in need, fundraising) can also be interesting and valuable, research shows that activities which require youth to work directly with service recipients (e.g., tutoring, serving food) are usually perceived as more meaningful by youth. These activities tend to promote more positive outcomes.
4. **Reflection**: Reflection helps adolescents integrate the values associated with performing service into their everyday lives. Reflection can be an inbuilt component in service programs in most cases. As parents, you can also help your child reflect on their service work by asking questions and listening to their thoughts about their experiences.

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