



WHAT AM I RESPONSIBLE FOR?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Global Poverty** through the value of **Responsibility**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource explores the value of responsibility in the face of global poverty with its enormous scale. It leads us to think about the parameters of responsibility as a value: What are we ultimately responsible for? What are the limits of our individual sense of responsibility? Of our collective responsibility? It presses learners to think about what commitments can be made to increase one's sense of responsibility towards others, while acknowledging that there are hard limits to what we can do.

The resource is designed to be facilitated in sections, with a break in between for the service activity. Prior to the service activity, a question will be posed to learners to consider during their service. After service, they will have an opportunity for reflection and processing.



Time Estimate:

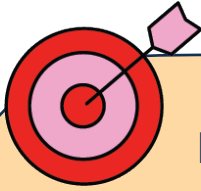
30 minutes



Best Uses:

- To be paired with a service activity component.
- For young adult and adult learners.

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Facilitator reads the following for context:

According to UNICEF-World Bank's 2023 Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty, an estimated 333 million children – 1 in 6 – live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 a day.

Globally, children comprise more than 50 per cent of the extreme poor, despite making up only a third of the global population. Children are more than twice as likely as adults – 15.8 per cent versus 6.6 per cent – to live in extremely poor households, lacking the food, sanitation, shelter, health care, and education they need to survive and thrive. [See [here](#) for UNICEF press release with data points.]

Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is one feeling that arises for you when you read these statistics? (It is enough to just name the feeling.)
- Given the enormity of issues of poverty, what would “successful service” look like for you in your service work today? Try and be specific and come up with one thing.

5 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE: RESPONSIBILITY

Facilitator reads to the group:

Engagement with global poverty and its enormous scale leads us to think about the value of responsibility, in different forms. We all have responsibilities – to ourselves, to others, to step in when we see a need and to take action toward making the world a better place to live. And yet, responsibility in the face of issues of such large magnitude raises all kinds of questions for us to contend with. What, exactly, are we responsible for? What are the limits of our individual sense of responsibility? Of collective responsibility? Is my responsibility to “fix” a particular problem? To take one action? To engage in ways that have ripple effects even if I don’t see them?



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is one core tension you personally feel when thinking about how the value of responsibility impacts your service work?

6 min



8 min



JEWISH ANCHOR

Facilitator continues reading to anchor in Jewish wisdom:

In *Pirkei Avot* – a collection of ethical teachings from Rabbinic Jewish tradition – we are offered moral precepts and fundamental principles to guide the way we live our lives.

Chapter 2, Mishna 6 states:

It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- This Mishna can be understood as referring to different things (what “the work” is is left unstated). What is one interpretation you might offer?
- What is the overall tension that the Mishna raises? (Express it in your own words.)
- How does this relate to the way you view your responsibility in the service work you are doing today?

Facilitator asks someone to read a summary of the Starfish Story. (The story is adapted from a 16 page essay – “The Star Thrower” – published in 1969 by American anthropologist Loren Eiseley.)

As an old man walked the beach at dawn, he noticed a young boy picking up starfish and putting them into the sea. He asked the boy why he was doing this. The boy answered that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun. “But the beach goes on for miles and there are thousands of starfish,” countered the old man. “How can your efforts make any difference?” The young boy looked at the starfish in his hand and placed it safely into the waves. “It makes a difference to this one,” he said.

Facilitator continues:

In many ways this story connects to the Jewish ethic of responsibility. It is something we do one person at a time, one day at a time, one act at a time. And yet, there are things we can do and notice that can bolster our sense of responsibility, so that one act becomes two acts, and more.



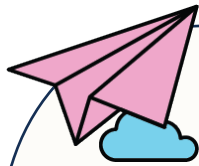
*** PROMPT BEFORE SERVICE ***

Facilitator prompts the group:

- As you go through service, what actions/reactions - of your own and the population you are serving - do you notice that bolster your sense of responsibility?
- What are there moments that compel you to do more, and what are there moments that cause you to pause?

BREAK FOR SERVICE EXPERIENCE

5 min



PROMPT ACTION

Facilitator prompts the group:

Let's return to the questions posed before service:

- If you have pen and paper, review the questions posed above and spend 2-3 minutes quietly writing your answers.
- If you don't have pen and paper, or are not in a place conducive to writing, divide into groups of three and together review your responses to the questions above, focusing on specific actions, reactions and moments that bolster your sense of responsibility.
- Share your responses with the full group, comparing experiences.

Facilitator gathers the group and asks everyone to complete the following sentence, encouraging group sharing:

- I feel MOST responsible towards a cause, even if I can't complete it, **WHEN** I _____.

3 min



CLOSE WITH INTENTION

Today's conversation prompted us to think about the value of responsibility as it relates to our individual capacities and commitments. By recognizing the limitations of what is possible for us to fix, alongside the awareness that we might actually have more to offer within us, will hopefully leave each us with greater nuance about what it means to responsible for causes, both small and large.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is a new perspective you were introduced to through this conversation and/or your service experience today?