

What is Reflection?

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Every alternative break program should provide its participants with both educational and direct service opportunities. The process by which your participants will mentally and emotionally synthesize the two is called Reflection.

Human beings have a natural need to reflect on past experiences, to work through the feelings associated with those experiences. Without adequate time to do so, our thoughts tend to become distorted by frustration, emotional overload and bum-out. Reflection allows us to turn inward, to ask ourselves tough evaluative questions like, "Who am I?," "What do I stand for?," and "What changes do I need to make in my life?"

Reflection ...

- Is the key to developing a long-term commitment to service.
- Leads to thoughtful and thus more effective service.
- Helps participants to search for long-term solutions to the problems they witness on-site.
- Validates the feelings of each individual: participants who feel uncomfortable, frightened or discouraged during a service experience need to share those feelings and realize that they are not alone in their reactions.
- Helps students to internalize the lessons learned on break and connect those lessons to their own personal choices and behavior.

Reflection Models

There are many reflection models, some of which are outlined in the Things section of this manual. One strong model is *The What?, So What?, Now What?* way of conceptualizing and structuring a reflection session; its three steps are outlined below.

The What?

Step one pertains to the substance of the group interaction and what has happened to each individual. It deals with facts, occurrences and leads naturally into interpretation.

The What? is used to start the reflection process by asking "What happened today?" or "What did each of you do?"

The So What?

Step two pertains to the difference the experience made to individuals. It looks at the consequences of the days actions and gives meaning to them. Members of the group abstract and generalize what they are learning and shift from the descriptive into the interpretive. At this point

the questions asked are usually, "What did your experience mean to you?," "How do you feel about what happened today?," and "What did you learn from today.?"

The Now What?

Step three involves the process of taking lessons learned from the experience and reapplying them to other situations and the larger picture. It is a time for goal setting and long range planning. The *Now What?* can range from discussions of "What will we do the rest of the week?" to "What will we do when we get back to campus?" and "What will we do in the upcoming year?"