

# LEARN FROM A CHILD

## Objectives:

- Overcome fear
- Connect to community
- Develop empathy
- Access new ways of learning

**Suggested Scheduling:** First day activity

**Time Required:** 3-4 hours

## BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATIONAL INSIGHT

At Indicorps, we introduced the “Learn from a Child” activity on the very first afternoon of a fellow’s arrival to orientation. After a proper welcome, a few ice-breakers, a reiteration of what the year is about, and some basic ground rules, this exercise is designed to ease new volunteers into the field by spending a day “learning from a child.” As children are less threatening, open-minded and quite forgiving with language, the activity gives volunteers a place to start, to overcome fears, to develop empathy, and to recognize simple ways to enter, connect, and learn from community.

## ACTIVITY

This activity is best conducted in partnership with a community-based organization or non-profit working with children. The activity can be set-up as an afternoon field trip. Assign each member of the volunteer cohort to take responsibility of a child or a group of children for half-a-day within a structured space such as a zoo, an amusement park, a museum, around a lake, etc. The goal is to connect with the child/children despite language and cultural barriers.

The organizers should set a few parameters and request the volunteer’s full presence for this time frame. The sequence for the afternoon fieldtrip may include a short briefing about the activity with the cohort (before meeting the children), an introduction to and an ice-breaker with the children, 3 hours of fun (with observers), a goodbye and send-off of the children, a period of silent journaling, and a debrief of the activity with observations from organizers.

## ADAPT EXERCISE FOR A SOLO FELLOW OR VOLUNTEER:

If you are volunteering on your own and entering a new community, you might be able to adapt this exercise in a few ways at the end of your first week:

1. Tag team with a few peers to help a teacher run an afternoon recess or activity in a local school. Your mission will be the same - to connect with the child/children (for whom you will be responsible). Ideally, you can conduct a similar reflection session with the teacher and your peers.

2. Explore with your host family ways you can simply focus on deeply connecting with the for one afternoon. Carve out an activity where you make that the goal. Journal on the reflection questions above.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did happiness look like for the child?
- How did the child's notions of happiness differ from your own notions of happiness?
- What did you learn from the day? What did you learn about connection and possibility? What did you learn about yourself?
- What were your best moments?
- Where did your presence wane? Where did you lose focus of the task at hand?
- What were your expectations?
- What fears crept into the story?
- How will this experience inform your approach for the upcoming service project?

