

saint mary's press

# Justice and Service Ideas

for ministry with young teens

**HELP**

Heads-up | Easy | Low-Cost | Purposeful

Joseph Grant

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To Anne, Brendan, Fiona, and Aidan, and those young prophets  
who have opened their eyes and my heart to God's transforming justice

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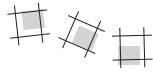
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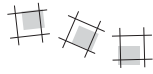
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# Introduction

*Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* is one of seven books in the HELP series—a collection of **H**eads-up, **E**asy, **L**ow-Cost, and **P**urposeful activities for young adolescents. These strategies are designed to be used as part of a comprehensive youth ministry program for grades six to eight. The strategies can stand alone or complement a religious education curriculum.

The other books in the HELP series are as follows:

- ☉ *Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Hands-on Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Holiday and Seasonal Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Retreat Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)

These books are helpful resources for anyone who works with young adolescents in a church or school setting. They can provide a strong foundation for a year-round, total youth ministry program whose goal is to evangelize young adolescents and support them in their faith journey.

## Overview of This Book

*Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* may be used by a coordinator of youth ministry, a director of religious education, catechists, teachers, a parish youth ministry team, or any adult who works with young teens. Ownership of the book includes permission to duplicate any part of it for use with program participants.

Some of the strategies in this book are short meeting openers that take no more than 10 minutes. Others are intended to be developed over a period of time. All are designed to foster justice education and attend to the spiritual needs of young teens as growing prophets and disciples.



As they work through these strategies, some young teens may become uncomfortable with experiences and information that challenge the status quo. Some adults in the community may be even *more* uncomfortable with those challenges. Be aware that your efforts to awaken the young people to the deepest meanings of the Gospel may encounter resistance. Also be aware of the life-changing, paradigm-shifting, Reign-building possibilities of those efforts.

### **Format of the Strategies**

Each strategy begins with a brief description of its purpose. The next element is a suggested time for the activity. This is flexible and takes into account several variables, such as the size of the group, the comfort level of the participants, and whether you want to include a break. Use the suggested time as a starting point and modify it according to your circumstances. It is a good idea to include time for a break within the longer strategies.

Next is a description of the size of the group that the strategy was written for. Most of the strategies work with a range of group sizes. If your group is large, be sure to recruit enough adults to help with logistics and supervision. A good rule to follow is that for every six to eight young teens, one adult should be present.

In some strategies a section on special considerations follows the one on group size. It includes things such as notices about remote preparation requirements and cautions to pay special attention to a particular developmental issue of early adolescence.

A complete checklist of materials needed is the next part of the presentation of every strategy. A detailed description of the strategy's procedure is then provided, followed by alternative approaches. Those alternatives may be helpful in adapting the strategy to the needs of your group.

Frequently included is a list of scriptural passages that may be used with the strategy for reflection or prayer. The list is not exhaustive; a Bible concordance will provide additional citations if you want to add a more substantial scriptural component to a strategy.

The final element in each strategy offers space for keeping notes about how you might want to use the strategy in the future or change it to fit the needs of your group.

The final strategy in this collection is different from the others in that it is not a step-by-step procedure for conducting a specific activity. Instead it provides a commentary on the dynamics of involving young people in works of justice and service; ideas for focusing, planning, and deepening the experience of outreach projects; and brief descriptions of strategies you might want to develop.

## Programming Ideas

The strategies in this book can be used in a variety of ways. Consider the following suggestions:

- ⊙ The program coordinator, catechists, teachers, and coordinator of youth ministry may collaborate to plan youth meetings and special activities that use strategies from this and other books in the HELP series.
- ⊙ Most of the strategies in this book may be used anytime during the year, either as they are presented or with adaptations. Consider doing some of them in the summer months, when most young adolescents are less busy and may be open to a variety of activities. Youth ministers may use the strategies as part of a strong summer service program for young teens.
- ⊙ Schoolteachers may use ideas from this and other books in the HELP series to supplement their day-to-day curriculum.
- ⊙ Many of the strategies in the HELP series can be adapted for use with multi-generational groups.

## Standard Materials

Many of the items in the materials checklists are common to several strategies in the series. To save time consider gathering frequently used materials in convenient bins and storing those bins in a place that is accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Some recommendations for how to organize such bins follow.

### Supply Bin

The following items frequently appear in materials checklists:

- ⊙ Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- ⊙ masking tape
- ⊙ cellophane tape
- ⊙ washable and permanent markers (thick and thin)
- ⊙ pens or pencils
- ⊙ self-stick notes
- ⊙ scissors
- ⊙ newsprint
- ⊙ blank paper, scrap paper, and notebook paper
- ⊙ postcards
- ⊙ notepaper
- ⊙ envelopes
- ⊙ baskets
- ⊙ candles and matches
- ⊙ items to create a prayer space (e.g., a colored cloth, a cross, a bowl of water, and a vase for flowers)

### Craft Bin

Many of the strategies use craft activities to involve the young people.

Consider collecting the following supplies in a separate bin:

- ☉ construction paper
- ☉ yarn and string, in assorted colors
- ☉ poster board
- ☉ glue and glue sticks
- ☉ fabric paints
- ☉ glitter and confetti
- ☉ used greeting cards
- ☉ beads
- ☉ modeling clay
- ☉ paintbrushes and paints
- ☉ crayons
- ☉ used magazines and newspapers
- ☉ hole punches
- ☉ scissors
- ☉ stickers of various kinds
- ☉ index cards
- ☉ gift wrap and ribbon

### Music Bin

Young people often find deep and profound meaning in the music and lyrics of songs, both past and present. Also, the right music can set an appropriate mood for a prayer or activity. Begin with a small collection of tapes or CDs in a music bin and add to it over time. You might ask the young people to put some of their favorite music in the bin. The bin might include the following styles of music:

- ☉ *Fun gathering music that is neither current nor popular with young teens.* Ideas are well-known classics (e.g., *Overture to William Tell*, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, and *1812 Overture*), songs from musical theater productions, children's songs, and Christmas songs for use any time of the year.
- ☉ *Prayerful, reflective instrumental music, such as the kind that is available in the adult alternative, or New Age, section of music stores.* Labels that specialize in this type of music include Windham Hill and Narada.
- ☉ *Popular songs with powerful messages.* If you are not well versed in popular music, ask the young people to offer suggestions.
- ☉ *The music of contemporary Christian artists.* Most young teens are familiar with Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, and Steven Curtis Chapman. Also include the work of Catholic musicians, such as David W. Kauffman, Steve Angrisano, Bruce Deaton, Sarah Hart, Jesse Manibusan, and Jessica Alles.

## Other Helpful Resources

In addition to the seven books in the HELP series, the following resources can be useful in your ministry with young adolescents. All the books in the following list are published by Saint Mary's Press and can be obtained by calling or writing us at the phone number and address listed in the "Your Comments or Suggestions" section at the end of this introduction.

*The Catholic Youth Bible*, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (2000). The most youth-friendly Bible for Catholic teens available. The scriptural text is accompanied by hundreds of articles to help young people pray, study, and live the Scriptures.

*Faith Works for Junior High: Scripture- and Tradition-Based Sessions for Faith Formation*, by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart (1993). A series of twelve active meeting plans on various topics related to the Scriptures and church life.

*Guided Meditations for Junior High: Good Judgment, Gifts, Obedience, Inner Blindness*, by Jane E. Ayer (1997). Four guided meditations for young teens, available on audiocassette or compact disc. A leader's guide includes the script and programmatic options. Other volumes in this series, called *A Quiet Place Apart*, will also work with young teens.

*Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens*, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (1999). A collection of 274 prayers by and for young adolescents in grades six to eight.

*One-Day Retreats for Junior High Youth*, by Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly (1997). Six retreats that each fit into a school day or an afternoon or evening program. Each retreat contains a variety of icebreakers, prayers, group exercises, affirmations, and guided meditations.

*Prayers with Pizzazz for Junior High Teens*, by Judi Lanciotti (1996). A variety of creative prayer experiences that grab young teens' attention. The prayers are useful in many different settings, such as classes, meetings, prayer services, and retreats.

*ScriptureWalk Junior High: Bible Themes*, by Maryann Hakowski (1999). Eight 90-minute sessions to help bring youth and the Bible together. Each session applies biblical themes to the life issues that concern young teens.

Catechism Connection for Teens collection, by Lisa Calderone-Stewart and Ed Kunzman (1999).

*That First Kiss and Other Stories*

*My Wish List and Other Stories*

*Better Than Natural and Other Stories*

*Straight from the Heart and Other Stories*

*Meeting Frankenstein and Other Stories*

The five books in this collection contain short, engaging stories for teens on the joys and struggles of adolescent life, each story with a reflection connecting it to a Catholic Christian belief. Each book's faith connections

reflect teachings from a different part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Two other books, both published by Free Spirit Publishing in Minneapolis and distributed by Saint Mary's Press, may be particularly helpful supplements to *Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*. Both of these books are useful for religious education groups and Confirmation candidates as well as youth ministry programs.

*The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over Five Hundred Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference*, by Barbara A. Lewis (1995).

Hundreds of service ideas in areas like literacy, the environment, hunger, politics, and animals.

*The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose—and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*, by Barbara A. Lewis (1991, rev. 1998). A guide to help young people turn creative thinking into positive action. Includes tips on things like Internet research, media coverage, surveys, and petitions.

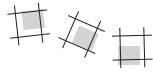
### **Connections to the Discovering Program**

The Discovering Program, published by Saint Mary's Press, is a religious education program for young people in grades six to eight. It consists of fourteen six-session minicourses. Each session is 1 hour long and based on the principles of active learning.

The strategies in the HELP series cover themes that are loosely connected to those explored by the Discovering Program, and can be used as part of a total youth ministry program in which the Discovering curriculum is the central catechetical component. However, no strategy in the series presumes that the participants have taken a particular course in the Discovering Program, or requires that they do so. The appendices at the end of this book list the connections between the HELP strategies and the Discovering courses.

### **Your Comments or Suggestions**

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the HELP series. We are also interested in new youth ministry strategies for use with young teens. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the series editor, Marilyn Kielbasa, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at [mkielbasa@smp.org](mailto:mkielbasa@smp.org). Your ideas will help improve future editions of these books.



# Label Makers

## OVERVIEW

This activity uses a soup can label as a symbol to help the young people recognize intolerance and see more deeply into themselves and others. It also provides a format to address the broad implications of stereotyping, and challenges the young teens to look for the Christian response to it.

### Suggested Time

35 to 45 minutes

### Group Size

This strategy works best with a group of twelve or more.

### Special Considerations

This activity requires the young teens to take some risks. It works best when the group members have achieved a certain level of comfort with one another, ideally after the group has met regularly over a period of time.

Even if the group members know one another well and have good self-esteem, they may not be comfortable wearing randomly distributed labels in procedure step 3. You might want to invite the participants to read their labels silently and then discuss them without pinning them on. Or add some control by distributing the labels carefully rather than randomly, avoiding any obvious problems such as giving the label “Heavy” to a young person who is overweight.

### Materials Needed

- ☀ notepaper, envelopes, and stamps
- ☀ newsprint or poster board, and a marker
- ☀ masking tape
- ☀ one can of soup
- ☀ thin-line permanent markers, one for each person
- ☀ safety pins, one for each person
- ☀ a can opener
- ☀ a jar or bowl

### PROCEDURE

*Preparation.* Well before you meet for this session, send a note to each person, inviting him or her to bring a can of soup. Bring one additional can of soup yourself.

Write the following phrase and list of words on a piece of newsprint or poster board. These represent stereotypical labels that young people often use. You may wish to substitute terms that are more common in your area or more appropriate for your participants. Avoid anything that might be racially or sexually offensive. If you have more than twelve people in your group, you may wish to add more labels. You could also repeat labels.

You are . . .

- |           |          |             |
|-----------|----------|-------------|
| 1. weird  | 5. dumb  | 9. slow     |
| 2. cute   | 6. cool  | 10. short   |
| 3. a nerd | 7. heavy | 11. a klutz |
| 4. a dork | 8. smart | 12. a loser |

Post the list where the young people will notice it as they enter the room.

1. As the young people enter the room for the session, make a mental note of their responses to the list you have posted. Direct everyone to stack their cans of soup in a designated location. Add the can that you brought. Then secretly remove one can from the stack, making sure that the young people do not see you doing so. Carefully remove the label from this can and return the can to the stack. (If another adult is present, you might ask her or him to attend to this task quietly while the young people are otherwise occupied.)

2. Give each person a thin-line permanent marker and a safety pin. Tell the participants each to take a can from the stack and to make a small mark on its bottom, identifying themselves and the can's contents. You might suggest that they use their initials and an abbreviation, such as "AG tom" for "Amy Green, tomato soup," or any other marking that they will recognize and understand later. Then direct them to remove the label carefully, using the safety pin, and return the unlabeled can to the pile.

3. Assign each person a number that corresponds to one of the numbers on the newsprint list. Direct the young people to write the word from the list on the blank side of their soup can label and put the label facedown in a pile in the center of the group. When everyone has added their label to the pile, distribute the labels randomly, and direct the young people to use their safety pin to attach their label to their clothing in an obvious place. Note that the label should be pinned so that the word written on the back is facing out.

4. In the large group, discuss the young peoples' reactions to the labels they were given. The following questions may be useful discussion-starters:



Does your label fit?

Is it a good description of who you really are?

Which of the names listed would you least want to be called?

Do you know anyone who fits perfectly into one of the listed categories?

Have you ever been referred to by one of these descriptions?

Which of these descriptions have you used when referring to another person?

Which of these names do you believe can be used as appropriate descriptions for a person?

Do you find any of these names offensive or inappropriate?

Did anyone come to mind as you read these names?

Do you believe labels are necessary when you are getting to know or relating with people?

5. Invite the young teens to return to the stack of unlabeled cans and retrieve the can they marked earlier. Ask them each to tell the group the contents of their can.

The can that you altered at the beginning of the session will be unclaimed. Place this mystery can in front of the group. Pass the can around the group and ask the participants to guess its contents. Then open the mystery can and place the contents in a jar or bowl.

6. Present the following ideas in your own words:



Let's take some time to reflect on the meaning of the symbols used in the exercise:

The labels are symbols of the things that stop us from welcoming, listening to, and caring about others.



The mystery can is a reminder that only God knows who we really are inside.

The can opener represents friendship, which opens people up and reveals the goodness in each one.

Think about how you are treated by those who do not know you, and how you treat others. Remember that no one can know what is inside a person until they build a relationship with that person. Labeling people leads us to be judgmental, close-minded, and close-hearted.

In life we do not get to choose how others label us, but we can choose how we respond to others and how we welcome and accept them. Only God knows the potential that lies within each person.

7. Remove the newsprint list and put it on the floor in the middle of the group. Tell the participants to remove one another's labels and place them in a pile on top of the newsprint. Conclude by reading Ps. 139:1–18, 23–24 prayerfully.

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ Reattach the labels to the cans, or make new labels to identify the contents of the cans clearly, and donate the soup to a food program.
- ⊙ If you have extra time, add this step before the closing prayer: Invite the group to name the kinds of people who are most often labeled or stereotyped by society. For example, they might name those who are minorities, foreigners, physically or mentally challenged, of different sexual orientation, homeless, and poor. Then ask the young people to list the kinds of people most often labeled and stereotyped in Jesus' time, and discuss how Jesus responded to them. Use the following Gospel excerpts for this list and discussion:
  - ⊙ *Foreigners and women.* John 4:6–10 (A Samaritan woman at a well)
  - ⊙ *Lepers and social outcasts.* Matt. 8:1–4 (A leper touched and cured by Jesus)
  - ⊙ *Criminals and public sinners.* Luke 23:39–43 (The good thief crucified with Jesus); John 8:1–11 (A woman caught in adultery)
  - ⊙ *The disabled and the mentally ill.* Matt. 9:1–8 (The cure of a lame person); Mark 5:1–13 (The cure of a man possessed by evil)
  - ⊙ *The simple and poor.* Matt. 11:25–30 (Jesus' welcome for the poor); Mark 10:46–52 (Jesus' cure for a blind beggar)
- ⊙ Challenge the young teens to create a poster with a slogan about the dangers of stereotyping. Add the labels from their soup cans and some scriptural quotes. Hang the poster in the youth room or church hall.
- ⊙ Ask the young people to make signs for the meeting space to remind the group that labeling is prohibited. Use the common symbol of a red circle with a slash as an example.

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**SCRIPTURAL  
CONNECTIONS**


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- ☉ Invite the young people to write prayers, reflections, poems, or rap songs about the influence of labels and stereotypes.
- ☉ As part of the closing prayer, tell the young people to write on the labels they removed from one another the names of people who have suffered discrimination. Offer a prayer for the victims of racism, ageism, sexism, and other stereotypes.

- ☉ Lev. 25:35 (Care for the outcast and foreigner.)
- ☉ Matt. 5:22 (Anyone who insults another will be condemned.)
- ☉ Matt. 7:1–5 (Do not judge.)
- ☉ Matt. 7:12 (Treat others as you would like them to treat you.)
- ☉ Rom. 15:7 (Accept one another as Christ accepts us.)

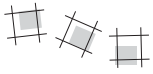
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**NOTES**


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Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





# The Peacemaker Award: In Recognition of Gospel Greatness

## OVERVIEW

This activity introduces real-life stories of Gospel commitment, presents Christian role models, and allows the young people to celebrate in a creative way the lives of peacemakers. It is ideal for retreats or youth group meetings, as a Confirmation project, or as a parishwide event.

### Suggested Time

The time is variable, depending on the number of awards and the number of people involved. If you are doing the activity with a small group, it can be completed in about an hour. If you are involving the whole parish, you may want to spread the process out over several weeks.

### Group Size

This activity works with any size group. If you have a large number of participants, they can be divided into small task groups.

### Special Considerations

The awards will have a greater impact if the entire parish is involved in the selection process. However, the activity will also work with a small group of young people. Before you begin the process, decide who will be involved and how much time you want to devote.

## PROCEDURE

### Materials Needed

- ☀ a Bible
- ☀ newsprint and markers (optional)
- ☀ materials for creating the awards (see the procedure section titled What Will the Award Look Like?)
- ☀ supplies for presenting the awards (see the procedure section titled How Will the Awards Be Presented?)

Whether you conduct this activity with a small group of young adolescents or make it a parishwide event, three questions must be answered by the group:

### Who Will Get the Award?

1. Read Matt. 20:25–28. Introduce the idea of the Peacemaker Award to the group by explaining that it is to be given to people who live out their commitment to the Gospel. The award is intended to challenge the popular concept of celebrity—that is, wealth, beauty, power, and strength—and focus instead on signs of integrity and Gospel living.

Discuss with the young people their understanding of the characteristics of a peacemaker and develop some guidelines for nomination. You might list on newsprint a number of adjectives that describe a peacemaker, such as the ones that follow:

- |              |                 |
|--------------|-----------------|
| ☉ humble     | ☉ compassionate |
| ☉ caring     | ☉ selfless      |
| ☉ committed  | ☉ reconciling   |
| ☉ courageous | ☉ generous      |

You might also list Christian acts of mercy, such as these:

- |                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ☉ feeding the hungry              | ☉ sheltering the homeless       |
| ☉ clothing the cold and naked     | ☉ welcoming the lonely stranger |
| ☉ visiting the sick or imprisoned |                                 |

2. Determine how many people will be given the award and whether the nominees should be local people or people from a broader region, such as a surrounding metropolitan area or your state. Then, based on the guidelines, invite the participants to think about whom to nominate for the award. If you are conducting this process over a period of time, you might ask the young people to consult their parents, parish staff, teachers, or other adults for ideas.

3. After the group has had a chance to think about the nominations, list the names of their candidates on newsprint. Ask the young people to give reasons for their choices by referring to the guidelines.

4. Invite the entire group to discuss the nominations, then determine the winners. You might conduct a secret ballot during which each person votes for his or her top three choices. Tally the results and award the top vote getters.

### **What Will the Award Look Like?**

Brainstorm a variety of creative options for the award itself, then choose one or more of those ideas and make an award for each recipient. Some possibilities are listed below. Any of them can be combined.

- ☉ Create a Gospel Greatness certificate or poster for each recipient, with the recipient's name, decorated with biblical quotes, words of appreciation, the rationale for the recognition, and descriptions of the recipient's Gospel greatness.
- ☉ Declare a Peace Day in celebration of the Gospel greatness of the award winners.
- ☉ Plant a tree or shrub in honor of the just witness of each recipient.
- ☉ Set aside a wall or bulletin board that features individuals whom the young people look on and celebrate as Gospel greats.
- ☉ Choose or create for each recipient a symbol of faith (such as a large candle or a wooden or clay cross, dove, or heart), decorate it, and all sign it (or select someone to sign it from the group).
- ☉ Create a peace banner or quilt. Use colored cloth and fabric paint or markers, and decorate it with the names of the recipients.

### **How Will the Awards Be Presented?**

Decide how the young people will present the awards, spread the word, and publicly recognize the recipients. Some ideas follow. Many of them can be combined.

- ☉ Host an honor banquet and invite the winners. Ask the Peacemaker Award recipients to share a few words with the young people.
  - ☉ Announce the awards at a weekly Mass, and ask the celebrant and the young people to do a ritual blessing of the recipients.
  - ☉ Announce the Peacemaker Awards as part of a regular school awards day.
- 
- ☉ *Gospel Greats Versus Hollywood Greats.* For maximum contrast with popular conceptions of celebrity, stage the announcement of the Peacemaker Awards to coincide with that of the Oscars, the Emmys, or other popular awards.
  - ☉ *Comparative Idols.* Make a list of the most recognized stars of music, sports, and entertainment. Invite the young teens to share their knowledge about the personalities and lifestyles of those icons. Compare their observations with the guidelines the group came up with for judging Gospel greatness.

## **ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

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**SCRIPTURAL  
CONNECTIONS**


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- ☉ *Saints Alive.* Invite the young people to choose and research radical Christian witnesses from the past or present, whose message is important for youth today. Challenge them to focus on models of just living and to identify local prophets and living saints.

The following scriptural references can be used with any part of this activity:

- ☉ Psalm 131 (My heart is not proud.)
- ☉ Isa. 58:6–11 (This is what God asks—that you shelter the poor; then your light will shine.)
- ☉ Matt. 18:1–4 (Who is the greatest in the Reign of God?)
- ☉ Mark 9:34–37 (Those who want to be first must make themselves servants of all.)
- ☉ John 13:1–15 (If I, the Lord, have washed your feet, you should wash one another’s feet.)

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**NOTES**


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Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.