

How Selfless Are You?

by Amy Scholten, M.P.H.

Selflessness or altruism is practicing concern for the welfare of others. It is the opposite of selfishness or concern only for the self. Pure selflessness involves giving time, energy, money or things to people without expecting anything in return.

The following assessment is to help you determine how selfless you are. Please keep in mind that this is a general assessment and not a diagnostic tool.

Directions: please read each question carefully and choose the answer that describes how you typically act. When finished, interpret your score at the bottom of the page.

- 1. You are walking into a store when a homeless person asks you for five dollars. You would...**
 - a) Give it to him
 - b) Tell him you are sorry – you can't spare five dollars, but you feel guilty afterward
 - c) Ignore him or tell him to get a job

- 2. You are taking a walk when an enthusiastic teenage boy approaches and asks if you have a minute to learn about an organization that helps sick children. You would...**
 - a) Donate some money to his cause
 - b) Politely listen but not contribute
 - c) Walk away

- 3. Your romantic partner asks you to accompany him/her to an event that you don't like. You would...**
 - a) Agree to go because it makes you happy to see him/her happy
 - b) Make up an excuse for not going, but offer to do something else that makes you both happy
 - c) Get angry at him/her for asking you to do something that you don't like to do

- 4. A skinny, starving dog shows up at your doorstep. You would...**
 - a) Provide it with some food and then try to find a home for it
 - b) Ask other people if they could help the dog
 - c) Tell it to go away and close the door

5. **You find a wallet with \$400 cash. The owner of the wallet lives rather far away. You would...**
- a) Mail the wallet to the owner
 - b) Contact the owner to come and pick up his wallet or turn it over to the police
 - c) Take the cash
6. **You're only willing to help someone if you know that you'll get some benefit from it**
- a) False
 - b) Sometimes true
 - c) True
7. **You help people when you want them to think well of you**
- a) False
 - b) Sometimes true
 - c) True
8. **When you do a favor for someone, you expect a favor in return**
- a) False
 - b) Sometimes true
 - c) True
9. **You get the last seat on a crowded bus. Among those who are standing on the bus, you notice an elderly woman. You would...**
- a) Insist that she take your seat
 - b) Feel guilty but do nothing
 - c) Do nothing – you feel entitled to your seat
10. **You're watching your favorite TV show when a friend calls. She's very upset and crying because her boyfriend just broke up with her. You would...**
- a) Listen to your friend as long as necessary, missing your TV show
 - b) Listen to your friend briefly and ask if you could call her back later
 - c) Tell your friend right away that it's not a good time for you and you will call her back later
11. **You're on your way to an important meeting at work and realize you forgot to leave food and water for your cat. Immediately after work you have to catch a flight to another city for business. You have no time to go home. You'll be gone overnight and have nobody else to take care of your cat. You would...**

- a) Miss your work meeting, drive home and get food and water for your cat – at least she won't be hungry and thirsty all day
- b) Go home after work to feed your cat and then hope you can reschedule your flight
- c) Go to work and then catch your flight - you know your cat will survive without food and water for a day or so

12. You're all set to go on a nice vacation cruise tomorrow when your best friend calls to tell you that his spouse just died in a car accident. He's very distraught and has no family or other close friends to comfort him. He doesn't want to be alone. You would...

- a) Cancel your vacation and spend time helping your friend
- b) Find someone else to look in on your friend while you're away, or seek help from his church or another community service
- c) Tell him that you're very sorry and will help him after you get back from your vacation

Scoring

Number of a, b, and c Answers	Point Value for Answers	Total Point Value (multiply total number of a, b, and c answers by their corresponding point value)
Number a answers:	All a answers = 10 points	
Number of b answers:	All b answers = 5 points	
Number of c answers:	All c answers = 1 point	
		Score (add total of a, b, and c points):

Your Score	Interpretation
12-59	Your score suggests that you are good at looking out for yourself but could benefit from helping others more. Studies have shown that helping others is often good for our emotional and physical health. Our lives seem more meaningful when we ease the burdens of others. Helpful attitudes can also be contagious. When you help someone, you often inspire that person to help another.
60-94	Your score suggests that you are generally a helpful person but don't always go out of your way to help others. In some cases, you help others only when asked. Though you need not overextend yourself, consider anticipating a few more situations where you can help others. Keep in mind how good it feels when you do help and that you're also contributing to your own wellbeing.
95-120	Your score suggests that you are a very helpful person. You not only help when asked, but you anticipate situations where you can help. You are contributing to the wellbeing of others as well as your own. Keep up the good work!

Source:

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Biography

Amy Scholten, MPH, has a Master of Public Health in health promotion and education from the University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Science in food and nutrition from Framingham State College. She is a freelance health writer and has taught stress management at Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY, USA.