

Raising Grateful Children

Rona Renner, RN and Marisol Muñoz-Kiehne, PhD

Thanksgiving is a time to think about showing an “attitude of gratitude” no matter what food is being served.

In these challenging economic times, it’s up to adults to teach children to be grateful for the goodness in their lives and to learn how to be concerned about others. This can be a challenge when parents are under stress, so keep in mind that your children learn their values from you.

Many memorable words have been written on the value of gratitude. “Gratitude is the memory of the heart,” (Jean Baptiste Massieu). “Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul,” (Henry Ward Beecher). And if you ask a child to tell you what they are grateful for they are bound to say something about their parents’ love, along with ice cream or toys.

As parents, we want our children to learn gratitude. Psychological studies have established that grateful people are healthier and happier than those who are not as grateful. Indeed, it has been found that gratitude protects against stress, enhances self-esteem, and promotes personal and occupational success.

No one is born grateful. Gratitude is a value and a virtue that is learned from others, and it is strengthened through practice. How to teach our children to be grateful? **If I am a child, I will give thanks when adults around me...**

Show by example, demonstrating gratitude to children or in their presence.

Help those who need help, along with children, so they realize how fortunate they are.

Appreciate, recognize, and praise children when they act in grateful ways.

Remind children to practice gratitude at every opportunity.

Eliminate ungrateful attitudes and models.

Here are some ideas:

- Be alert to others’ generous acts, and thank them directly.
- Show children the good news featured in newscasts and newspapers.
- Appreciate effort, attempts, and kind gestures in daily life.
- Thank relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, sitters, and strangers in the presence of children.
- Have a space at home designated for gratitude with photos and mementos from memorable occasions.
- Keep a personal or family gratitude diary, and include children when making entries, or encourage them to have their own.
- Make thank-you phone calls and write thank-you notes and letters in response to invitations, gifts, help, and generous acts.
- If you can, volunteer at a nursing home, animal shelter, or food bank.
- Don’t make children feel guilty, but feel grateful for their abilities and for what they have and enjoy.
- Don’t compare yourself with others, since there will always be those who appear to be better off.

Book Suggestions:

- *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* (Myla & Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- *Thanks & Giving: All Year Long* (Marlo Thomas)
- *Words of Gratitude for Mind, Body, and Soul* (Robert A. Emmons, Joanna Hill)