

Ask Nurse Rona: An Attitude of Gratitude

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Q: My five-year-old son is starting to think that he can have anything he wants when we're at a store, a restaurant, or at a friends house. How can I start to teach him to be grateful for what he has?

A: It's normal for children to want the good things they see around them, and it's up to adults to set limits on when to say "yes" and to model an attitude of gratitude for them to emulate.

Every day, children are exposed to media messages about buying expensive clothes and toys. Commercials often communicate an attitude of greed, and suggest that we shouldn't be satisfied with what we have. Parents like you need to make an effort to present different values. How do you model an attitude of gratitude in your family?

Here are some ideas:

- Reflect on the things you're grateful for. Write them down, or say them aloud. Your attitude will have a great influence on your children. Ask your children what they're grateful for. Encourage them to make a list or draw a picture.
- Teach your children to express their thanks when they are given a present or a service. For example, ask your child "How would you like to show your gratitude to Grandpa Phil for spending the day with you and taking you to the movies?"
- Let your children know you appreciate them. Give them specific examples like, "When you read a book to your little sister, it makes her happy and it gives me a chance to make dinner. Thank you for your help."
- Be generous to others, and include your children in the experience. For example, you can bake extra pies and you and your child can bring them to a neighbor who's alone, or to a shelter for the homeless. When you receive good service from someone like a waitress or a doctor, say "thank you" and talk about why you appreciated the experience.
- At dinnertime each family member can go around the table and say one thing they're grateful for.
- Spend time outdoors and enjoy the wonders of nature. Tell your children how much you appreciate the sun, the rain, and the natural elements around you. Encourage your child to learn ways to protect the environment.
- Participate in a food drive or a community fundraiser. Your children will notice when you communicate with actions your desire to help people who are less fortunate than you.
- Before you go to bed at night, spend a few minutes reviewing your day and what you are grateful for.

Developing an attitude of gratitude in yourself is a wonderful way to teach your children about living a meaningful and happy life.