



TO THE POINTE

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Raising Grateful Children

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During the holiday season we often take time to reflect on who and what we are thankful for in our lives. While Thanksgiving and Christmas are wonderful for helping us celebrate this important value each year, we can also work towards creating an ongoing practice of gratitude in our lives. Teaching children to notice what they are grateful for on a regular basis has many benefits including building their capacity for empathy, strengthening their interpersonal relationships, as well as improving their overall happiness and self-esteem.

Of course, doing simple things like teaching children to have good manners and to say “thank you” is part of this process. However, there are many ways that parents can go beyond encouraging good manners. The first step to do this is to break down how we experience and understand the concepts of thankfulness and gratitude.

The Raising Grateful Children project at UNC Chapel Hill (<https://hussong.web.unc.edu/drrl/rgc/>) found four essential aspects that make up the full experience of gratitude **-Notice-Think-Feel-Do**. Let’s imagine it as a cake with four layers with each layer building on the one below it. First, we must NOTICE the things in our lives for which we can be grateful. Second, how do we THINK about why we have been given those things? Third, how do we FEEL about the things that we have been given? Finally, what can we DO to express our appreciation?

Below is a conversation guide with some open ended questions in order to engage children in talking about their thoughts and feelings at each of these four stages.

NOTICE: What have you been given or what do you already have in your life for which you are grateful? Are there gifts behind the material gifts for which you are grateful, like someone thinking about you or caring about you enough to give you the gift?

THINK: Why do you think you received this gift? Do you think you owe the giver something in return? Do you think you earned the gift because of something you did yourself? Do you think the gift was something the giver had to give you? If you answered no to these questions, then you may be more likely to be grateful.

FEEL: Does it make you feel happy to get this gift? What does that feel like inside? What about the gift makes you feel happy? These questions help the child connect their positive feeling to the gifts that they receive in their lives.

DO: Is there a way you want to show how you feel about this gift? Does the feeling you have about this gift make you want to share that feeling by giving something to someone else? Prompting children after experiences of gratitude in order to motivate acts of gratitude, whether they be acts of appreciation or paying it forward, may help children connect their experiences and actions in the world.

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The previous information was taken from the “The Raising Grateful Children Project”. They have created a free online program to support parents in talking with their children about gratitude.

The link to access those additional resources is: <https://hussong.web.unc.edu/gratitude-conversations-program/>

Family Activities

Here are some family activities that you can try this holiday season together to focus on building a culture of thankfulness and gratitude in your family.



Gratitude Jar

Keep a gratitude jar, somewhere accessible. If possible, let the kids decorate it with their favorite colors or stickers. Each day, ask everyone (including yourself!) to write down one thing they're thankful for and put it in the jar. Read the statements weekly and/or during difficult times as a coping strategy.



Gratitude Journal

A gratitude journal can have an amazingly positive effect on their overall happiness. Set them in the right direction by asking them to write down a few things that they are grateful for each day. Studies have shown that gratitude journaling has tremendous benefits for physical health and psychological well-being!



Gratitude Tree

Similarly, you can build a gratitude tree, or thankful tree together. Cut out leaves, have the kids write what they're grateful for on them, and hang them on a branch.



Volunteer

Get the kids involved in the community. Gather food for a food bank or serve meals at a homeless shelter. Research organizations in your area that offer service opportunities. Service to others teaches gratitude in ways that nothing else can.



Letters

Have the kids write letters of gratitude to people they do not know personally, such as police officers, military personnel, the fire department, school administrators, bank tellers, and hospital employees. When possible, hand-deliver the letters with a special treat, or mail them.



Donate

Donating helps your children understand how fortunate they are and everything they have to be grateful for, whether it be a roof over their heads, clothing, toys or a loving family. When your child outgrows their clothes or toys, encourage them to donate the items to families and children who have less. Involve your children in the process by researching the available donation centers or charities in your community, and take them with you to make the donation.



Thank You Cards

Another great option is to write thank you cards to people you do know. You can write a thank-you letter to mom or dad, to grandma or grandpa for birthday gifts, to a special teacher or pediatrician.

Even your mailman or garbage truck drivers deserve appreciation!



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