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Counselor's Corner

Gratefulness also needs to be practiced to take hold, and it is a lifelong process to keep it going. Here are some tips to start to instill that behavior in your children, and to help them create an attitude of gratitude that will stay with them through adulthood.

- 1. Good manners and gratefulness overlap, so if you get them started young to recognize kindness and generosity, when they are older it will be easier for them to grasp.** Saying "thank you" might just be a learned behavior for now, but when they are old enough they will be able to attach the meaning to the manners.
- 2. Model your grateful behavior.** Set an example for the kids when they do something you appreciate. "I'm so happy you cleaned up your toys," or "Thank you for being nice to your sister." If you work these into your daily routine you'll be surprised how quickly they'll want to pick it up and start thanking you too.
- 3. Create a thankfulness routine.** You can do it daily or weekly, maybe every night before they go to bed or at the dinner table one night a week. Simply ask them one thing they are thankful for that day or week, and have a little discussion about why they are grateful.
- 4. When you are practicing your thankfulness routine, encourage children to look beyond "things."** Ask your children to find gratitude in more than the material items they treasure. For example, you can share that you are thankful for the sunny day that is allowing them to play outside or how happy it makes you to have friends that are nice and caring.



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5. Help kids understand that gifts are thoughtful gestures, not them hitting the jackpot. When they receive something, no matter how big or small, encourage them to focus on the thought behind the gift. We all know the old adage "It's the thought that counts," and it has stuck around so long because it's true. Even if it's a tiny drawing a friend did at school for them, point it out by saying something like, "That was so sweet for them to draw that for you; they must think you are a really good friend." Adding meaning to the act of giving will create a deeper appreciation for them.

6. Avoid comparison. We always want to tell kids "Other children would be grateful for what you have," but this really isn't teaching them to be thankful, it's more of a comparison, usually one that won't have the impact you hope it will. Sometimes, it can make kids feel guilty, instead of grateful. Instead of drawing comparisons, try educating them about differences. Explain to them in an age-appropriate way that there are people who do not have toys and food and clothes, without comparing the two.

7. Let kids help out. The more children contribute around the house, the more they realize how much effort it takes to keep a household running. Giving your child age-appropriate chores like setting the table or feeding a pet (or for teenagers, working a part-time job) will help them appreciate that these tasks require effort and don't just happen automatically. They will also feel the satisfaction of earning what they have and making a valuable contribution to the family.



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8. Make giving and volunteering a family habit that you participate in together and make sure the kids know what you are giving, where and why.

Have them help gather things to donate and tag along when you drop them off. Volunteer as a family to help serve dinner at the senior center. Adopt a family for the holidays at the community center. Find out how they would like to give back.

9. Hit the "rewind" button. Explain the steps that made it possible for your child to have certain simple things, like a glass of milk. A farmer had to raise the cow, get up early to milk it (going with the "simple" explanation here), then someone had to package the milk (another job), it had to be brought to the store, YOU had to go to the store to get it and pay for it, and then you poured it. It helps to get them thinking about what goes into everyday things and the importance of playing a part, rather than the milk just "appearing" before them. When they start to realize how much work and effort go into things, they appreciate them more.

10. Get them excited about giving. Usually when it comes time to put together a holiday wish list for kids, the only person on their list is themselves. Have them come up with some ideas of what they would like to give, and get them excited about making someone else's day brighter by sharing a gift. It will help them appreciate the thought and effort that go into the gifts they receive themselves.

Jenny Witte writes a regular blog at mamatoga.com, where this piece first appeared.

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