

Raising a Grateful Child

Cultivate Appreciation in Children

Being grateful is a way of approaching life with a generous spirit and an open hand; we manifest this by our thoughts, words, and behaviors. Grateful people acknowledge the abundance in life and share it with others.

- ▶ Help children appreciate the kindness, love, and care they receive.
- ▶ Teach children to label and express emotions—their own and others.
- ▶ Value other people and the environment, in thought and deed.

Develop a Grateful Family Culture

Children raised in a family where gratitude is part of the culture tend to appreciate what they have, learn to practice kindness, and do things for others.

- ▶ Consider the “thorns and roses” of your children’s days: the thorns are challenging or disappointing, and the roses represent something they appreciate.
- ▶ Set an example by expressing appreciation for children’s efforts. “Thank you for putting away your toys.”
- ▶ Acknowledge children for common courtesies and simple acts of kindness. “You are very kind. It was thoughtful of you to give Lulu a hug when she fell down. You helped her feel better.”

Help Children Identify and Acknowledge Emotions

Young children are just beginning to identify, understand, and respond to their emotions. To the extent that it’s appropriate for their stages of development, we need to help children recognize and learn to articulate their feelings and then they can relate to how others might be feeling.

- ▶ Make talking about feelings (yours, your child’s and other people’s) part of daily discussions.
- ▶ Encourage children to put themselves in the shoes of others, and then talk about how others might feel? Ask your child, “How do you think that person might be feeling? Why?”

Express Gratitude to Others

- ▶ Smile at people. Smiling is a warm way of acknowledging another person.
- ▶ Openly express appreciation. Thank the waitress who serves your food, the crossing guard who helps us across the street, or a neighbor who does a kind act.
- ▶ Talk to children about the plights of others, e.g., when you see people who appear not to have a home, talk with your children about why they might not have a home, how they might be feeling, and how to help.

Make Contribution a Family Affair

Family activities help children feel appreciative of their good fortune, learn that they can make a positive difference, and strengthen the family bond.

- ▶ Volunteer as a family. Get involved with organizations such as The Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, and learn about ways that your family can contribute toward the well-being of others.

- ▶ Plan family activities to raise funds for organizations or write thank you cards to military personnel.
- ▶ Make cards and gifts. Children can make appreciation cards and gifts for friends, relatives, and people who take care of us: military personnel, mail carriers, teachers, librarians, firefighters, or police officers.
- ▶ Share what you have. Talk to your children about giving new toys to other children who have broken toys or none at all. Start a tradition of children giving some gifts that receive at a birthday party to children who live in a shelter or on the street.
- ▶ Research practical ideas and meaningful philosophical thoughts on kindness, gratitude, and volunteerism.

READING CAN INSPIRE FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE

In addition to having lasting effects on cognitive, language, and literacy development, many books nurture children's understanding of emotions and the feelings of others.

Books for Toddlers

- ▶ "Thanks from the Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle
- ▶ "The Thankful Book" by Todd Parr
- ▶ "The Feelings Book" by Todd Parr

Books for Preschoolers

- ▶ "Bear Says Thanks" by Karna Wilson and Jane Chapman
- ▶ "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein
- ▶ "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" by Carol McCloud and David Messing (illustrator)
- ▶ "Mama Panya's Pancakes" by Mary Chamberlin, Rich Chamberlin and Julie Cairns (illustrator)
- ▶ "Sylvester and the Magic Pebble" by William Steig
- ▶ "Too Much Noise" by Ann McGivern and Simms Taback (illustrator)
- ▶ "Thank You, Mr. Falker" by Patricia Polacco

Books for School-Age

- ▶ "The House That Jane Built: A Story About Jane Addams" by Tanya Lee Stone and Kathryn Brown
- ▶ "Under the Lemon Moon" by Edith Hope Fine and Rene King Moreno (illustrator)
- ▶ "Mama Panya's Pancakes" by Mary Chamberlin, Rich Chamberlin and Julie Cairns (illustrator)

