

“Thankful”

The Bible admonishes us to be thankful. “...let us be thankful.” Hebrews 12:28 (NIV). Children’s ability to understand the concept of thankfulness and gratitude develops with age and maturity. All along their path of development, we can incorporate small things into our daily interactions with them that will set the stage for a greater understanding of gratitude. Here are a few ideas for things we parents can do to foster feelings of thankfulness:

1. Model Thankfulness.

This seems like a simple idea, but it can have a big impact. Modeling thankfulness can be as simple as saying “thank you” to your child when she does a favor for you, but it can also be more than that. Modeling gratitude can be a regular part of daily life when we mention (so our kids can hear us) how grateful we are for things like:

- our kids getting along and not fighting
- the beautiful weather outside
- your child’s teacher who is especially patient or kind
- your child’s grandparents who babysit regularly

2. Discuss needs versus wants.

Discussing the difference between “needs” and “wants” can be really eye-opening to older kids. Young children (under 4 years old) might have a harder time understanding this distinction. We can help our kids see the difference between items they need to survive and thrive versus items that are nice but are not necessary. Making this distinction clear, helps them see how they can be grateful for all the



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things that meet their needs as well as for the “add-ons” they have in their lives.

3. Repetition matters.

While none of us are fans of our kids saying meaningless “thank you” for gifts or treats, repetition does have a role in fostering gratitude. Young children especially learn a lot through repetition and routine. In order to form a habit, sometimes you must first form a habit of speech. By repeatedly encouraging our kids to say “thank you” or “please” for gifts or items, it reinforces a mindset of thankfulness. Although it may seem half-hearted at first, over time most kids begin to really understand more the significance of their words, especially if you are helping them learn gratitude in other ways as well.

Although society may tell us that the “next best thing” is what will make our kids happy—a new pair of shoes, the newest video game, etc. we know that is not true happiness. Our heart tells us, and research backs up the fact that true happiness comes from gratitude and caring about others. But fostering thankfulness doesn’t have to be just another item to check off on our “to do” list of parenting. By incorporating simple activities and being mindful of our words, our kids will naturally develop thankfulness that will anchor them to a place of lasting happiness.



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Reference

Webb, Amy. (2020). Super Simple Research Backed Ways to Raise a Thankful Child. Downloaded from: <https://thoughtfulparent.com/raising-thankful-child.html>



North American Division
Family Ministries
Children's Ministries

9705 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046

Phone: 443-391-7200
www.nadfamily.org
www.childmin.com



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