

Q. The holidays are here and all my children talk about is what they are getting! I want them to enjoy themselves but I also want them to be grateful for their blessings. How can I get them to be more thankful?

A. Great question! It is fun to see our children open up gifts and be excited to get something they've wanted for a long time. However, you are right to want them to be grateful for what they have. Research shows that adults who are grateful for the simple things in life are the happiest and have way less depression and stress! It takes time to teach this concept and it helps if parents also have an attitude of gratefulness. Here are some strategies to help your children develop a spirit of thankfulness.

1. Help your children to notice and be thankful for all the fun things life has to offer by actively pointing out the wonders around them on a regular basis.

2. Thank your children when they do something kind or good. When it's their idea to do something kind for others make sure you show gratitude for it. Occasionally throw in a free hug and a "Thank you for being you. I love you so much."

*Model the behavior. Thank your spouse or domestic partner for small kindnesses. Thank relatives, friends and colleagues in front of the children. Especially don't take your nearest and dearest for granted, they may grow up thinking gratitude is only for strangers and that love is expressed by ignoring their closest loved ones or expecting kindness without reciprocation. Go ahead and prompt the kids to thank others for kindness or gifts too. "What do you say when someone's nice to you?" is a good question.

*Read them stories about gratitude. This carries a much bigger impact than movies and videos, although sharing kid videos is intimate too. There's nothing like a parent's voice to reach a child's heart.

3. Listen for children's laughter and babies chatter. Comment on it frequently so that your children find it perfectly normal to seek out the happy, beautiful human sounds and to actively seek laughter. By remarking on such positive emotions in humans around their own age, they

will be encouraged to see this as an expected norm.

4. Help children to notice and be glad for their freedom. If you live in a place like the United States of America, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, or another democratic society, teach your child about the democratic legacy they have inherited. Many people around the world do not have the freedom to speak their mind, many cannot expect those in power to listen to them directly, and many are not even able to travel, work or worship freely. It is important to teach children to value their freedoms, liberties and responsibilities as a valuable lesson. As they grow, help them also to understand how to be a good citizen.

*Help children read stories suitable to their age about the political, cultural and social development of their country. And don't leave it just at your own country; learn about other countries too so that they feel connected. In the age of the internet, this has never been easier nor more important.

*When your child is old enough, help them to read such important documents as your country's Constitution, Bill of Rights, human rights documents and international equivalents. They will learn gratitude for the amazing thinkers of the past who have left them with these legacies.

5. Thank your friends and family for caring for you and all they do for you and do this often in front of your child. They and others care about you and it is important for children to grow up knowing this openly and are not afraid to express the same emotions themselves.

6. Show appreciation for the food you eat. Many in the world go hungry and many of us have stopped respecting the food trail from farmer through to our table. It is important for children to understand how food is grown, how food is transported and sold before it gets to your home. Help them learn about this food trail and understand all the people involved in growing and producing food. Tell your children stories about food you had when you were younger and how it has changed over time. And always say thank you at the table before a meal, whether it is faith-based or a secular recognition, it is an important part of helping children learn gratitude toward what nourishes them.

*Get your children to grow some of their own food. From radishes and lettuces through to corn

stalks and even a little wheat, having your children learn how to grow their own food will teach them much about the effort of creating food and they will be more grateful toward those who help food reach our tables.

*Include children in your cooking. Children are never too young to learn to make food alongside you. It is an important part of understanding nutrition and respecting that food doesn't just simply turn up on the dinner table.

7. Help your children to enjoy the sun. Tell them how great it feels on your face, how it provides light to us and energy to plants which in turn become our food. Help them to understand how amazing it is that planet Earth is in a "just right" position to the Sun, allowing us to thrive and to have forests, oceans, water cycles and more, that sustain us and other living beings.

8. Look closely for trees every time you go out with your children. Even in the most concrete environment, teach them to look for the trees forcing their way through the steel and cement barriers, adding a little green beauty. In fall, help children appreciate their scarlet and golden leaves—do craft projects together using the leaves, rake them up together or just dive into piles of leaves and have a good laugh. And tell children that trees are special because they house birds, squirrels and many other creatures, they give us oxygen and they also provide wood for cozy camp fires where children can enjoy hot chocolate and s'mores.

9. Turn cloudy and wet days into an exercise of gratitude. When the whining begins about it being too wet, too windy or too dull, help children to be grateful for what they do have. They are in a safe, cozy environment away from the rain. They are able to do lots of fun things such as read books, watch a movie, draw pictures, bake, write a story, talk to you, spend time playing with a sibling, etc. Or get them to don their rain boots and raincoat and head on outside for puddle splashing. Watch in the rain for rainbows—they are free to everyone and can inspire the most amazing ideas in a child's mind .

10. Teach children that it's important to connect with others. We are not here to do it alone. We are each incomplete and while we bring our own strengths to bear when seek to achieve something, it is only when we connect our strengths with those of others that we can truly achieve. Teach children that they are fine as they are and to be grateful that in connecting with others, they have the opportunity to be their very best selves.

11. From time to time, ask your children what makes them feel grateful. Some parents do this daily but as long as you do it regularly, it will keep your children attuned to gratitude. For example, asking them "What three things made you grateful today/this week/this month?" is a good way to begin. At the end of the year, do a "gratefulness" round-up together, to allow them to take stock of the things they are grateful for over the past year. Now and then ask your children to talk about the people in their lives that they're grateful for, and why.

12. Tell your children often that they have the power within to turn gloom into happiness simply by changing their attitude. Tell them that they will be happy if they choose to be thankful, if they are warm and open to others, and if they regularly stop to assess what is good about their life and what they have already by way of relationships, love and personal achievements. Help them by explaining often that money does not buy happiness, but gratitude does.

13. Insist that your children acknowledge gifts in an age-appropriate way. Nothing is less welcome in a child than a sense of entitlement. Keep a list of holiday gifts/givers and make sure children thank the donor. No one cares if the note is misspelled or messy. Everyone cares if it is missing.

14. Gratefulness should not just be fostered about good things only. If you are teaching your child to be grateful, then don't miss the chance to express gratefulness when things are less rosy. Can you be grateful after a car accident in which no one was hurt? Can you be grateful for a rainy day because crops need the rain?

15. Make a list. Writing a gratitude list (or drawing a picture with young children) makes people of any age feel better.

16. Focus on why we are grateful. It is one thing to say that we are grateful for a beautiful day, but it is so much deeper to acknowledge we are grateful for the sun shining because it makes us happier. It is one thing to say we are grateful to have someone as our child, but it is so much more significant to acknowledge that we are grateful that God has given us a child that brings us joy. Are you grateful simply because of things that happen or have you been made grateful at the core of who you are?

17. Serve others. One way to foster gratitude in teens is to take a group to serve at a soup kitchen, help build a home with Habitat for Humanity, or work with a Midnight Run group bringing blankets and food to the homeless, for example. Kids who are lucky enough to have a home and parents realize not everyone has the same blessings. It can be an eye-opener.

I'm sure that if you follow this list all year long, your children will develop an attitude of thankfulness that will enrich their lives, develop coping skills, create a sense of satisfaction with life and create adults who will share their successes in life with their community!

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Information gathered from the following websites: <http://www.wikihow.com/Teach-Kids-to-Be-More-Thankful-People> and