

## Being Thankful During the Holidays and Beyond

Make sure that gratitude for gifts and kindness are part of the Thanksgiving and Christmas season and beyond.

Gratitude is a character trait based on a genuine sense of caring. It usually goes beyond a simple thank you, although that can be a good place to begin. Genuine thankfulness requires thought and action in order to be mutually beneficial to the giver and receiver.

Gail Innis from Michigan State University Extension, states that real gratitude of sense of thankfulness begins when we are able to recognize and point out small things that make us thankful. Adults can model the behavior through daily words and actions. You can start early with your children, even when they are very young. For example: "Dad works so hard for our family. Why don't we make him a special meal to show him how much we appreciate him?"

There are other ways that we can develop an attitude of gratitude and these come from The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation.

1. Discuss a gift a person receives during the holidays. Ask what they liked about it. Talk about the gift giver and how nice it is to be remembered and appreciated by someone.
2. Write a thank you note for gifts or even nice deeds people do for you. Also, have your children draw a picture or write a note of thanks. Share how good it feels to get a note or letter in the mail. Assist your child, depending on age and developmental stage, in addressing and mailing the note. Putting feelings on paper can make them more real for children.
3. Make a thank you phone or Skype call to the gift giver. Encourage your child to talk about the gift and share how he or she will use it.
4. Involve your family in local charitable events. Stay informed about community activities that help those less fortunate. Discuss upcoming events and brainstorm ways your family could assist. Include your children in a discussion about the charity you would like to support and why. Even a very young child can assist in choosing a toy for a holiday toy drive.
5. Read stories to your children about generous people and characters. The book, "The Giving Tree," by Shel Silverstein might be a good way to open a conversation about the attitude of gratitude. In "Have you Filled a Bucket Today?" author Carol McCloud tells of an easy way to teach children the power of affirming words and action.
6. Take advantage of time off during the holidays by helping your children clean out old toys, books and clothing they no longer use. Talk about how much other children and families will appreciate them. Donate them to local organizations who give items away such as Manna, Neighbor to Neighbor, Aledo Advocats, Freedom House or other area groups.
7. Have a family baking day and prepared packages of homemade items. These can be shared with elderly neighbors or a service provider such as the mail carrier, a bus driver or teacher.
8. Pay attention to people who display generosity and kindness. Point them out to your children. For example, "Wasn't it nice of that lady to help her elderly dad with getting into the car?" Or, "Did You see that man pick up that litter that someone else dropped in the parking lot? Say thank you out

loud when someone opens the door for you or lets you cut in front of them in the check-out line or does any other kind act.

9. Take time each day at dinner or bedtime to mention one thing you are thankful for.

Creating a feeling of gratitude that last throughout the whole year takes time and effort, but can be well worth it. Repetition and guidance from parents and loving adults are important keys to instilling gratitude in children.