

Teaching Kids To Be Thankful

Help your children express their thanks and gratitude.

by Cheryl Sloan Wray
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As we approach the holiday season, our minds often turn to things for which we should be thankful for: health, family, shelter, friends—all of these things become more important during the time of year.

How, though, do we as parents instill an attitude of gratitude into the lives of our children? How do we make children realize that they have much for which they can be thankful? How do we teach them the admonition found in 1 Chronicles 16:34: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever" (NIV)?

If you're like most modern parents, you've said a few times more than you'd like: "You should be more grateful." Maybe the statement came after your oldest son has begged for a new pair of expensive shoes simply because a friend has the same pair. Or perhaps it came after your youngest daughter threw a fit because she couldn't get a new toy.

Children today seem to lack the attitude of thankfulness. They look too often towards material possessions and don't know how to say a simple "thank you." It seems that the old adage is very true: "Thankfulness could well be the finest sentiment of man—and also the rarest."

Christine McWhirter, mother to nine-year-old Shannon and seven-year-old Erin, said she often gets frustrated with her daughters' attitudes. "Our society replaces quality time with our children with giving of material things, and then when there is something they want and they are told 'No,' then they think life is not fair," says McWhirter. "I think all children show that ungratefulness some of the time."

Take the time to consider how you can instill a thankful attitude in your child's life by following these five simple steps:

- Give Love, Not Just Rewards.
A thankful attitude is alive in people who appreciate what they have. When parents reward their children for every accomplishment, or bribe their children with monetary rewards for good behavior, those children begin to expect rewards. Rewards should be reserved for special times. Instead of doling out money or gifts, give your child expressions of love. Let your son know, through your words, how proud you are of his school accomplishments. Reinforce your daughter's good behavior with hugs.
- Give Your Child Responsibility.
Children who are given more responsibility in their own home and for their own possessions take more pride in what they have. In turn, they are more thankful. Start by giving your children clearly-defined chores and letting them make their own decisions about various aspects of their lives (ex: what clothes they will wear to school, what movie the family will rent on Friday night).
- Get Involved In Your Community.
Children who understand the hurts of others can better appreciate and be thankful for the abundance in their own lives. The holiday season is the perfect time to start a new tradition in your family: get involved in community projects. To come up with a project, talk to leaders in your church or social groups about possible programs;

you can also look up "social agencies" in your yellow pages. The possibilities are endless: helping with an illiteracy program, collecting toys for a homeless family, working in a soup kitchen.

Marjorie Webb's family often donates time and money to a local homeless shelter in their city. She believes the experience has taught her daughters, fourteen-year-old Ashley and ten-year-old Megan, an important life lesson. "Megan recently noticed a mattress up under an overpass and realized that someone was sleeping there at night," Webb said. "She immediately said we are blessed that we have a house."

Remember, Jesus told us to take care of the hungry and thirsty; when we care for those less fortunate than ourselves, He said we are caring for Him. Matthew 25:35 says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." (NIV).

- Be A Role Model.
Children imitate their parents, so let your children see a thankful attitude in your own life. Some things you can do to show your children a thankful attitude include:
 - thanking others on a regular basis for services and well-done jobs (i.e. clerks, waitresses, your spouse, the child);
 - making prayer a regular part of your life;
 - talking about the needs of others and acting on them as funds or time allow; and
 - having an amount of restraint where material possessions are involved.

McWhirter tries to emulate a thankful attitude towards her children. "I try to treat them, and others, with a thankful spirit. I also make sure that I teach them how to express their thankfulness at appropriate times."

- Make Thankfulness A Year-Round Concept.
It sometimes seems that we stress thankfulness only during the months of November and December. If thankful attitudes are practiced all year long; however, children will learn that those attitudes should be a way of life. First Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us that we are "to give thanks in all circumstances" (NIV); we are truly supposed to be thankful at all times.

Raising thankful children isn't as hard it seems. Success truly depends upon your commitment to making thankfulness an important aspect of your life on a day-to-day basis. Transforming your abode into a grateful home, helps your child grow up to be thankful adults.

About The Author:

Cheryl Sloan Wray is a freelance writer with more than 500 articles to her credit, and is the author of three books. Her latest is [*Writing for Magazines: A Beginner's Guide*](#) (McGraw-Hill, 2004).