



Teaching Thankfulness

For those of us parenting in the United States, this is the time of year we celebrate Thanksgiving. As a mother, Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays because it gives me the opportunity to purposely teach about gratitude. I'll give you an honest parenting tip here; developing an attitude of gratitude in your children is one of the most amazing things you can do. Here's why.

-- Gratitude reminds us who we are.

We're not better than anyone else, and we're not worse either. Our kids desperately need to learn that message. The child who grows up honestly believing he is the center of the universe (and they all start out that way) is one unhappy kid.

-- Thankfulness means considering others.

When I recognize the efforts and service each of my family members bring to the rest of us, I am motivated to serve also. That's another reason why it's so important to teach our kids their part in our families; not just so they'll learn how to do chores (important all by itself), but so that they can take their legitimate, needed place in the family structure.

Each of us in a family has a vital role to play. Someone else may be able to do our tasks, to be sure, but **no one** can do them the way we can. We are each unique and it's that unique service that makes our family the special one it is.

Kids who understand that what they bring to their family is needed and valued blossom right before our parenting eyes! And they start to understand that other family members bring unique gifts to the family, too. Cooperation and respectfulness start to make sense as tangible tools that bring us all blessings when we first offer them to others.

All from the seed of thankfulness.

-- Gratitude means recognizing and appreciating our blessings.

It's way too easy to get caught up in consumerism in our fast-paced society. But honestly, at some point in that accumulation process, you gotta ask, "what's the point?". If you want your kids to move past the "me! me!" stage in life, then a solid parenting tip to explore is to start talking with your children, no matter what their age, about the blessings in their lives.

Got a roof over your head? Talk about the folks who don't. Plenty of food to put in those tummies? There are families who don't know where their next meal is coming from. Is your body working at all? You are fabulously rich!

Appreciating our blessings starts with acknowledging them...seeing them for what they truly are; the gifts you have in this life, right here, right now. That's good stuff!

As a parent, don't make the mistake of always waiting for the big stuff in your family life. It's that toothless grin, giving by your infant only to you...it's the joy on their face when your child successfully learns what you're trying to teach them, whether it's how to ride a bike, to fish, to twirl on the dance floor, or to do pre-calculus.

Which takes us to the next idea in this parenting tip about gratitude.

-- Joy comes from thankfulness.

We all say we want our children to be happy, but often we don't clarify what that might look like. Most parents see quite quickly that 'more stuff' is not the road to happiness. It simply doesn't work! In fact, it usually has the opposite effect and produces whiny, spoiled kids who are experts at ruining the calm of the entire family.

If you can see this truism, but don't know what the next parenting step is, then give this idea of intentional thankfulness an honest try. When gratitude is *practiced*, when we teach our kids that everything they have is a gift and their job is to be good stewards of it, something amazing happens in our families. Whiny-ness leaves and contentedness moves in. Selfishness lessens its grip as thinking of others is encouraged and praised.

You'll be amazed at what you personally learn to be grateful for, too. Nothing can compare to your child's joy as she tells you what a great sister she has, or how she watched one child help another at school today. Thankfulness enables your child to see the good in life. And that produces a life of abundant joy.

See what I mean? That's why I believe this parenting tip of teaching gratitude to our children ranks as one of the best ones of all time. So as you prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving this year, consider all the tiny, yet powerful ways you and your children can increase your habit of being thankful. Your new custom will serve you extraordinarily well all year long.

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