

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

As we mentioned in last month's email, research is now demonstrating the emotional, physical, and mental health benefits of having an "attitude of gratitude". During this season of the year when most American children are focused on "making their lists and checking them twice", we encourage you and your family to shift your focus from receiving to giving - and express gratitude for all your blessings. Gratitude is a learned attitude - so we encourage you to teach your children this important quality. Here's why:

Dr. Robert Emmons, Professor of Psychology, University of California, Davis, has published many studies documenting the benefits of a grateful attitude. In one study, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions - keeping track of daily hassles, listing gratitudes, or listing neutral life events. Those who kept "grateful lists" exhibited heightened well being. They also exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, and felt more optimistic about the upcoming week. (1)

Another study on gratitude demonstrated that young adults who kept daily gratitude journals experiences more enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy. They were also more likely to have provided someone else with emotional support.

For parents - there are definite benefits to expressing gratitude to your partners. One study found that partners who expressed gratitude experienced greater communal strength in their relationship. (2)

And...during this time of spiritual celebrations, another study demonstrated that those who regularly attend religious services and engage in religious activities are more likely to be grateful. (3)

During this holiday season, we hope you will take a break from the "busyness", count

your blessings - and teach your children to be grateful, too. Consider including spiritual worship in your celebrations!

1. Emmons RA and McCullough ME. "Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life" *J Personality and Social Psychology*. 2003; 84:377-389.

2. Lambert NM, et al. "Benefits of Expressing Gratitude - Expressing Gratitude to a Partner Changes One's View of the Relationship" *Psychological Science* 2010; 21:574-580.

3. McCullough ME, et al. "The Grateful Disposition: A Conceptual and Empirical Topography" *J Personality and Social Psychology*. 2002;82:112-127.



INFANTS and TODDLERS

Infant and toddlers are naturally self-centered, so you may think teaching thankfulness would be a difficult task. But, remember, they learn by copying you and imitating you.

Toddlers are also learning they are separate individuals from their parents and that parents do things to help them, so this is a wonderful time to begin teaching gratitude.

1. Say "thank you" many times a day - when your infant gives you something, when she lies still during diaper changes, when she helps put her arms through her shirt, when she gives you a hug or kiss.



PRESCHOOLERS

Your preschooler can now express himself verbally, so there are many fun ways to help him become a grateful person.

1. Continue to be a role model by saying "Thank you".
2. Consider having a night-time routine (or dinner time routine) of recounting 2 - 3 things for which you are grateful. "I am thankful for..." or "Let's tell each other something good that happened today." can help the conversations start.
3. Make up a song together about being thankful. You can use a tune your preschooler already knows and change the words.



ELEMENTARY

Elementary age children can appreciate other's feelings and emotions, so expressing gratitude becomes more important at this age.

1. Keep a family "Gratitude Journal". The children can help decorate the cover and draw pictures to accompany their entries. Write in the journal daily or weekly; include items from your mealtime conversations. (You may want to keep the journal at the table.)
2. Encourage your children to write thank you notes - for gifts received or as letters of encouragement to teachers, athletic coaches, and others



ADOLESCENTS

Thankfulness helps adolescents realize that they are loved and helps them focus on the more positive aspects of life - on what they have rather than what they don't have.

Thankfulness also helps the brain fully process events, especially sad or negative events, and helps these sad memories fade more quickly. So, adolescents will definitely benefit from learning gratitude!

1. Encourage your teen to go through her closet and room, selecting items for donation or garage sale. Giving also helps develop the attitude of gratitude. (Use the money from a garage sale to help the more

2. Let your toddler hear you saying "thank you" to your partner.

3. Help him learn to say "thank you" to others. "Let's tell grandpa thank you for the book."

4. Ask your child to tell you something each day for which she is thankful. Then make a sticky note and place it on a window or the refrigerator. Have a special celebration when the space is completed filled. Add your own note to be a good role model for your child.

5. Practice saying "no" to your child's requests for "things". Children who learn contentment are more likely to be grateful.

who have invested in their lives.

3. Have a "no complaints" day. Everyone in the family is given a rubber band to wear on one wrist. If caught complaining, the rubber band moves to the other wrist. At the end of the day whoever has not been caught complaining receives a special treat.

4. Have "Grateful Jars" on your kitchen counter - one for each person in your family. Anyone in your family can write a note of gratitude and place it in the person's jar. "Thank you for picking me up from school." "I appreciate seeing a clean room." Read the notes once a week.

needy.)

2. Grateful people are less likely to think materialism brings happiness. Have a family conference to discuss ways your family can decrease the materialism of the season; how you can give back to your community by serving.

3. Encourage your teen to maintain his/her own "gratitude journal", documenting 2 - 3 good things that happen each day.

4. Interestingly children and teens who do chores and who volunteer are more likely to have grateful attitudes. See our previous newsletter on Connected Parenting

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