



# Counselor's Corner

October/November 2018

## What is Gratitude?

Being able to recognize and appreciate the good things in your life can lead to increased happiness and life satisfaction. For children especially, learning how to be thankful can help in the development of interpersonal skills, including the BIG one – empathy. Gratitude lends itself to expanding our worldview. When we're thankful for even the small things, we're thinking of more than just ourselves; we're thinking about how all of us have the ability to positively impact another's life. Gratitude is powerful. (Watson, Rita; 2013: *Psychology Today*)

Gratitude is one of the trickiest concepts to teach children, but one of the most important. By learning gratitude, they become sensitive to the feelings of others, developing empathy and other life skills along the way, says Barbara Lewis, author of *What Do You Stand For? For Kids* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2005). Grateful kids look outside their one-person universe and understand that their parents and other people do things for them -- prepare dinner, dole out hugs, pray with them.

Instilling grateful feelings now will benefit your child later in life. A 2003 study at the University of California at Davis showed that grateful people report higher levels of happiness and optimism -- along with lower levels of depression and stress. Because we are not born grateful, it is important that parents model and teach this behavior.

### Check out these books about giving thanks!

[The Giving Tree](#) by Shel Silverstein

[Gratitude Soup](#) by Olivia Rosewood

[The Thankful Book](#) by Todd Parr

[Thank You, God, For Everything](#) by August Gold

## Teaching and Modeling Gratitude

Children model their parents in every way, so make sure you use "please" and "thank you" when you talk to them. ("Thanks for that hug -- it made me feel great!") Insist on their using the words, too. Here are other suggestions that you can model at home.

- **Work gratitude into your daily conversation** – Discuss the good parts of your day, every day and make it a habit! Teach children to focus on the positives!
- **Have kids help** – By doing chores, children learn that running the household takes effort. They will learn to appreciate what grownups do to help them every day.
- **Find a goodwill project** – Even something as simple as making soup for a sick friend can help to teach children to care for others and be grateful in their own lives.
- **Encourage generosity** – Donate toys and books to those in need so children can learn there are others in the world that are less fortunate.
- **Insist on Thank-You notes** – Sometimes just the act of saying thank you for a gift and describing why your child loved it will help him or her be more grateful.
- **Practice saying no** – Saying no sometimes makes saying yes other times even better.

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