

Dear Counselling Corner:

How can I help my kids show more gratitude? I feel as if my husband and I give them everything we can and they don't show us ANY appreciation in return. They have so much more than we ever had. I know that they are young, but I can't stop feeling frustrated and upset. My husband and grandparents tell me not to worry, but I do anyway. Please help me deal with my ungrateful children. Thanks.

Upset Mom



Dear Mom:

Your children are so lucky to have you! Not only are you giving them everything you can, you are also wanting to teach them an invaluable skill: GRATITUDE. Your children probably don't really understand yet what that is and likely have no idea how life was for you and your spouse. Their childhood is very different from yours. The ability to experience and show gratitude is positive in so many ways. According to Robert Emmons, the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, practicing gratitude can:

- Strengthen our immune systems
- Lower our blood pressure
- Improve our sleep
- Increase our positive emotions
- Help us to be more alert, alive, and awake
- Allow us to feel more joy and pleasure
- Increase optimism and happiness
- Help us to be more helpful, generous, and compassionate, forgiving, and outgoing
- Reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation

Fortunately, there are a lot of ways in which we can help our children understand and learn to show gratitude. Author Shannon Lambert has some fabulous suggestions for teaching gratitude to our children:

1. Encourage your child to say please and thank you. Our manners show that we do not believe we are entitled to anything and that in fact, we appreciate whatever comes our way.
2. Help someone less fortunate. This could be your neighbour down the street, grandma, or someone you know who is in a tough spot.
3. Volunteer. Help out at a homeless shelter, soup kitchen or non-profit.
4. Send out thank you cards. Express your gratitude for those who have added value to your life.
5. Look for awe-inspiring moments in your day. If the sunset is particularly beautiful, comment on it. If the sound of the baby's laughter warms your heart, tell your children. Encourage them to look for their awe-inspiring moments and share them with you.
6. Share your gratitude at bedtime. Take five minutes at the end of the day to ask your child what he is thankful for that day.

7. Share your gratitude at the dinner table. Take a moment at dinner time to share what you are thankful for. Go around the table, allowing each family member a chance to vocalize their gratitude.
8. Compliment others. Encourage your children to do the same. Share the things you appreciate about another person.
9. Keep a gratitude journal. This can be in any form that works best for your child's age, skill level and desire. Some children will want to spend time writing their thoughts down. Others may be more apt to express their gratitude through drawing or painting.
10. Write a letter. Encourage your child to write a letter to someone who has touched his life in some way. If he is comfortable, make a visit to that person to read the letter out loud. If not, mail it.
11. Create a family gratitude list. Post it on the fridge. Add to it when necessary.
12. Create a family gratitude journal. Leave it somewhere where everyone can access it and encourage your family to write in it whenever they are feeling grateful.
13. Give someone a gift. Help your child earn the money and purchase the gift. Or make a gift together.
14. Always look for the positive. Find something positive in frustrating situations and discuss.
15. Practice turning complaints into praises. Coach your children to reword their complaints into something that they appreciate instead.
16. Create a gratitude jar. Encourage your children to add to it anytime they are feeling grateful for something or someone.
17. Donate to a nonprofit. Nonprofits serve people in need and at this time of the year, they are always looking for basic necessities, meals, and gifts to give to those in need.
18. Take gratitude walks. While you walk, look for the simple pleasures in the day, such as the warm sun or the birds singing, and express appreciation for them. Use this time to ask your children what they are grateful for.
19. Ask why. As your child gets better at expressing gratitude, dig deeper. Ask why he is grateful for something and how it affects his day.
20. Work through envy. Help your child work through any feelings of jealousy she may have. Envy can come when we are not feeling thankful for what we have, and are focusing instead on what others have.

If you wish to meet with me or if you have concerns about your child and would like to access my services, please email me at hchang@sd43.bc.ca and I will provide you with more detailed information and permission forms.

The Counselling Corner is intended to offer some helpful ideas, encouragement, and insight on a variety of topics to support your child's social and emotional learning.

Harriette Chang
School Counsellor