

3 ways to teach gratitude & appreciation



From our guest contributor Michele Borba

The often overlooked and critical holiday skill for kids – gratitude and appreciation even when you’re disappointed with what you’ve received. If you haven’t checked that calendar, here’s a word to the wise: in the next few days your child is going to be receiving a gift from someone. My question: Have you taught your child the skill of appreciation?

Here’s another way of putting it: “How well do your kids handle disappointment when that gift they are anticipating from Grandma, Uncle Fred or Sister Sue doesn’t meet their hopeful expectations?” (Translation: the greatly-anticipated DVD player from Grandma turns out to be a pink cashmere sweater. How does your child respond to your mother or worse yet, to your mother-in-law?)

Appreciation is a skill that can be taught. The art of tact, gratitude and gracefulness are learned, and there still is

time to teach those glorious skills of how to appear appreciative before the relatives arrive with gifts for your kiddos.

3 Simple Ways to Teach Kids Appreciation

1. Rehearse Appreciation

Teach your child how to accept gifts graciously by rehearsing polite comebacks *prior* to the event.

A few gracious responses might be: "Thank you for this." "I really appreciate it" or "Thanks. That was nice of you." Sometimes "Thank you so much!" might be best.

Make sure to act out the appreciation role yourself. "Sometimes I don't get what I hope for, but I try to make the person who gave me the gift happy."

Younger kids can practice saying responses with their teddy bears or dolls. But remember: repeated practice is critical to succeed in mastering this skill. So please don't wait until the night before to start those rehearsals and think your kid is going to be able to pull off appearing gracious under fire.

2. Help Your Child Imagine the Recipient's Feelings

Set up a few pretend sequences and then role play with your child. For instance: "Suppose Aunt Helen is here right now. She spent a lot of time shopping for your gift because she loves you and hopes you're happy when you open it. Pretend she's watching you open that package. What can you say and do to let her know you appreciate her effort?"

3. Stress and Expect Appreciation

Emphasize to your child that he doesn't have to like a gift, but he *must* show his appreciation for the thought that went behind the giver's effort. That point will take a lot of little chats and not one long marathon lecture. So start the

little appreciation reminders *now*.

Also, be sure you're putting more emphasize on "giving" and not "getting" over the holidays. If your child is expected to "give" presents to others and spends his hard-earned pennies to purchase that gift, believe me he'll understand the concept of "appreciation" a lot quicker.

Keep in mind, the price of the present is irrelevant: homemade gifts are glorious! The key is allowing kids to experience the joy of giving to others including wrapping the gift, taking time to think *what* to give, and shopping or making that item. Hands-on giving is always the best way to help a child understand how it feels to be the recipient of appreciation or disappointment.

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