

# 7 proven ways to raise a grateful kid



*From our guest contributor, Michele Borba*

It's Thanksgiving Day and your family and guests are at your festive table ready for the meal to begin, but you first want folks to share their Thanksgiving blessings. Be honest. Which scenario would best depict your reaction when it's your children's turn to count their blessings with the group? Would you...

- 1. Beam with pride as they describe their gratitude for their life blessings?*
- 2. Gently remind them of things they could share?*
- 3. Want to die from embarrassment since your kids can't think of anything to say?*

If your kids need reminders to say "thank you", show appreciation or take for granted thoughtful gestures, then it maybe time for a gratitude makeover. Here's another reason to do so: Studies prove that the happiest kids feel an

appreciation for life—and that's regardless of their wealth or personal circumstances. They are also more joyful, determined, optimistic, resilient, less stressed and even healthier. So if you're a tad concerned that your kids' attitude of gratitude needs a little boost, the good news is that science also proves there are simple strategies to do so. One of the easiest ways is by establishing family rituals where kids count their everyday blessings. Here are a few to get you started:

- **Thank You ABCs.** This one is great for younger kids to do at the dinner table. You and your kids say the alphabet together but for each letter include something you are grateful for: *A, Aunt Helen; B, my brother; C, my cat*, and so on. Take it up a notch by explaining why they are grateful. Families with small kids rarely get beyond *H*, but the point is you're having fun together and you kids are also learning to be appreciative.
- **Thanksgiving blessings.** Say a prayer of thanks together before meals. Some families take turns so that each night a different member leads the prayer. Or do bedtime blessings when each child exchanges messages of appreciation for one another followed by a goodnight hug and kiss.
- **Gratitude letters.** Your child writes a letter to someone who has made a positive difference on his life but has probably not thanked properly in the past (such as his teacher, coach, scout master, grandparent). To maximum the impact, research says that your child should read the letter to the person face to face.
- **Set limits.** Having too much squelches appreciation. So fight the tendency to overindulge your child with too many things. Always giving kids what they want does not help kids learn to be grateful and appreciative of what they have.
- **Gratitude journals.** Another proven way to boost gratitude is by having your kids write something they feel

grateful ideally four times a week and continue for at least for three weeks. Younger kids can draw or dictate things they are most grateful for; older kids can write in a diary or in a computer. Why not do so as a family?

- **Thank your kids.** Don't overlook your kids' daily thoughtful deeds. Just be sure to tell them *what* they did that you appreciate so they are more likely to copy your example and send their own "appreciation messages" to others.
- **Expose your kids to the less fortunate.** Face-to-face experiences can go a long way in helping kids appreciate their blessings. So find ways for you and your child to do charitable work (playing with kids in a homeless shelter, reading to the blind, building low-cost house, or delivering meals for the bed-ridden).

***Remember, change is a process not a one-time activity. So stick to your commitment and find simple ways to help your child practice gratitude, reinforce any efforts and don't give up until you get the desired change.***



Dr. Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, parenting expert, TODAY show contributor and author of 22 books including *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*.

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