

# Nurturing gratitude in kids 365 days a year!



*From our guest contributor, Michele Borba*

Here are a few ways to boost an Attitude of Gratitude in our children 365 days a year!

## **1. Model Gratitude**

Kids learn gratitude by seeing others display appreciation in everyday, unplanned moments.

- How often do your kids see you convey your appreciation with hugs, words, or small notes to others?
- How often do you tell your kids how much you appreciate them?
- How often do you remind your children how much you value gratitude?

Tune up your own Attitude of Gratitude so your kids are more likely to copy your example. The fastest way to boost character is through example.

## **2. Set Limits**

Having “too much” squelches appreciation. New research suggests that wealth may actually reduce empathy. The reason? As our wealth grows, our need for people decreases. Nicholas Kristof points out in his blog, “How Do We Increase Empathy” that heart rates of wealthier research subjects are less affected when they watch a video of children with cancer. And 20 percent of Americans give significantly less to charity than those with less wealth.

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 do have.

## **3. 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.

## **4. Expose Children 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). Consider simple ongoing service projects for your whole family to do together. Just make sure you find ones that support your children's interests and strengths. The most popular community service projects among tweens and teens are 1. Helping children in needs; 2. Advocating for the environment; 3. Supporting homeless people. [Source: Harris Interactive, Sept. 2009]

The more children practice gratitude, the greater the odds that they will adopt it as a habit and life attitude.

## **5. Expect your kids to say “Thanks”!**

Parents who raise grateful kids don't do so by accident. They expect their kids to be appreciative and saying, “thank you” is required from the time their kids learn to talk.

Keep in mind that kids may need constant reminders: “Did you remember to thank Jeff's mom?” Don't overlook their slips: *“You can call to thank her when you get home.”*

## **6. Understand the Emotion Behind the Gesture**

A hard lesson for kids to learn is that they're really thanking the person not for the gift but the thoughtfulness behind it.

*“Grandma thought a lot about what to give you this year.”*  
*“Kevin went to five stores to try to find what would make you happiest.”*

Keep reinforcing the thought that went into the deed. Practice with your child *before* the birthday, the family reunion, the holidays or any occasion where you child may be receiving a gift. Help him or her learn how to be appreciative.

## **7. Teach Kids to “Count Their Blessings”**

Gratitude isn't learned from lectures but routines. Start simple family rituals that will help your children adopt an Attitude of Gratitude and appreciate their fortunes. Sure, you can say a prayer of thanks together before meals, but extend that ritual so your children learn to count their blessings every day and reflect upon the good things in their lives. Here are a few ideas:

- **Review the good things.** Help your children “Count their Blessings” every night by just reviewing all the things

they are grateful for. Our children are exposed to so much of the doom and gloom about life. Let's help our children reflect on the simple, wonderful good things in our lives that we so often take for granted. You might even cut out "Good News" (usually in the back pages of newspapers) that other folks are doing to make the world a better place and share them with your kids.

- **Say "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. Then, take it up one notch by having the person explain why he is grateful. Families with younger kids rarely get beyond H, but the point is that you're having fun together, and your kids are also learning to be appreciative. Older kids can reveal one thing they are grateful for that happened to them during the day, and then describe "why."
- **Say "Thanks."** Say a prayer of thanks together before meals. Some families take turns so that each night a different member leads the prayer of gratitude.
- **Create Bedtime Family Blessings.** Each child exchanges messages of appreciation for one another, followed by a goodnight hug and kiss.

Enjoy these next days with your family and your time together. Just don't forget to pause and count your blessings together and review all the things-both big and little-you are grateful for. After all, isn't that what families are all about?



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*.

Check out: [micheleborba.com](http://micheleborba.com) or follow her on

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