

Gratitude



After the death of a loved one, many people find it difficult to be thankful. A death can bring waves of sadness for a family, often making gratitude seem out of reach. Children may have an especially difficult time with this, as they can feel a lot of guilt and resentment toward the person who died, and they may think there is nothing left to be thankful for. However, as family members begin to accept the reality of the death, it is important to find ways to be thankful for all of life's blessings. In fact, being able to connect to what is good in life is a great coping skill for children and adults alike, as it can help build hope for the future. Gratitude has also been linked to better psychological health, which in turn leads to better physical health. Lastly, if your children learn to practice gratitude, they will carry that lesson with them throughout their lives and be able to pass it on to friends and family in the future. Consider these suggestions when helping to develop gratitude in your children.

- **Model gratitude.** One of the easiest ways to teach your children to be grateful is to model it yourself. Children learn more from being shown what to do than from being told what to do, so act how you want your children to act. Try keeping a gratitude journal or coming up with a list of things you are grateful for every day. Modeling gratitude can even be as simple as remembering to say “Thank you!”.
- **Share responsibilities with your children.** No matter their age, children can almost always help out around the house, whether it's sweeping the floor, setting the table, or making their bed. By helping with chores, they are learning the value of work and can learn to appreciate the effort involved in certain responsibilities.
- **Make gratitude a part of your daily routine.** Consider having your children name one thing they are thankful for as part of their everyday activities. Whether they ponder this over breakfast or you discuss it with everyone at the dinner table, have them reflect on their lives with appreciation. Or instead of asking them “How was your day?”, change that question to “What did you appreciate most about your day?”
- **Look for ways to give back to your community.** Doing volunteer work with your children can help them see the needs of others and encourage appreciation for what they have. Another option may be to have your children pick out clothes and toys that they have outgrown and donate them to a charity.
- **Read stories about gratitude.** By occasionally switching out your children's bedtime fairy tales with a book about gratitude, they can more easily relate to the concept and learn new ways to show thanks. The Further Reading recommendations listed in this handout include children's books on gratitude that are available from our Lending Library.

Talk to your children's teachers to see what lessons they teach on gratitude, because you may be able to get some more ideas from them. Although the methods will vary greatly by developmental stage, all children can benefit from learning a little about being thankful. Gratitude is a lifelong asset.

Further Reading:

- *The Thankful Book* by Todd Parr
- *When I'm Feeling Kind* by Trace Moroney
- *The Two-Hearted Numbat* by by Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymollina
- *Healing Your Grieving Heart* by Alan D. Wolfelt
- *The Grief Recovery Kit* by by Tanya Kilgore





References:

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