

Introduction

On Thursday, November 23rd, many families will gather around the dinner table to give thanks and honor the age-old tradition of Thanksgiving. It is not everyday that families carve out time for extensive meal prep in order to spend hours together enjoying (delicious!) food and participating in the inevitable 'dish party' that follows. On Thanksgiving, many families honor their own traditions which can include turkey, mashed potatoes, and a variety of other side dishes. Some families enjoy other main dishes that reflect their culture and heritage. Regardless of the dish or whether or not your family formally celebrates Thanksgiving, this time of year is often a time for expressing gratitude or giving thanks. This month's newsletter will focus on the positive benefits of gratitude for both parents and children (just in time for the holiday season!).

This series of newsletters is inspired by and created just for parents. If you have suggestions, comments, or ideas for future newsletters please email: opec@oregonstate.edu. For additional parenting resources, like us on Facebook (Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative) and follow us on Twitter (@OPECParentingEd).

Why it Pays to Be Thankful

At a young age, we are often taught to say 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'I'm sorry' in order to be polite or to show good manners. While this may be true, researchers are finding that gratitude is a unique expression of thanks with some real benefits for both parents and children! According to a leading expert on gratitude (Dr. Robert Emmons, UC Davis), there are four important reasons why gratitude benefits us: Grateful people tend to: 1) celebrate the present; 2) block negative emotions; 3) be more stress resistant; and 4) have a higher sense of self-worth. As parents, we want what is best for our children. Given the many benefits of gratitude (for both parents and children), what are some ways to grow a culture of gratitude at home?

Research has linked practicing gratitude with:

- Higher levels of positive emotions like optimism, enthusiasm, love, and happiness
- Kindness and generosity
- More positive feelings about life in general
- Experiencing fewer physical problems
- Better health practices like regular exercise and healthy eating
- Better sleep
- Lower stress levels
- The ability to cope with stress more effectively
- Living longer on average



Encourage An 'Attitude of Gratitude'

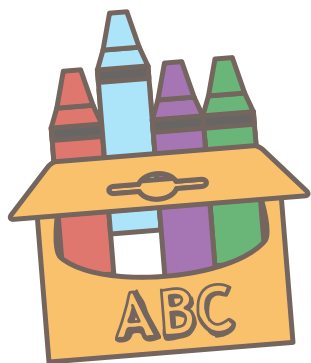
Gratitude is a skill (like mindfulness, cooking, or gardening) that can be practiced daily. The good news is that there are many different ways that you can choose to practice gratitude which means that you can decide which will work best for your family. Here are a few ideas to encourage an 'attitude of gratitude' that parents and children can work towards together:

- **Meal time:** Choose to eat a meal together as a family and take time to each say at least one thing you are grateful for.
- **Thank You Cards:** Write a real thank you card (together with your child) and put it in the mail. Discuss what you are thankful for and why you are sending the card.
- **Thank You Jar:** Set an empty jar in a central location in your home. Ask your family to put a message, a picture, or even a scribble in the jar of something they are thankful for. At the end of the month, have a family meeting and go through the jar together.
- **Journal:** Set aside a few minutes at the end of the day to quickly jot down something that you are grateful for.
- **Gratitude Vow:** On a sticky note (or something similar), write down a reminder to be grateful such as, "count your blessings!" and place it somewhere you will see every day (mirror, refrigerator).



Count your blessings!

Fun With Your Kid! Create a Colorful Thanksgiving Tablecloth



What You Need: Plain Wrapping Paper (any color), or a roll of paper (to cover the table), empty cans (*use a few from dinner preparation, just make sure they are clean and dry!), crayons, tape

Directions: Cover the table with paper (taping together sections as needed). Clean the cans and put crayons in for dinner guests. Children can help 'decorate' the tablecloth before dinner by adding names and drawings for each guest.

*Ask your guests to use the crayons to draw or write down one thing they are grateful for!



References

- <https://www.parent.co/10-science-backed-benefits-of-practicing-gratitude-with-kids/> by Sandi Schwartz (blog: <http://www.happysciencemom.com/>)
- https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good
- <http://www.parents.com/holiday/thanksgiving/grateful-for-fun/>



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