

## Teaching Children to Express Gratitude

by Kathy Slattengren

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We are responsible for teaching our children to say "please" and "thank you". This basic social skill is critical in showing respect for others. However, many older children have not fully developed this skill and it causes problems.

For example, one aunt explained how hard she worked to find neat gifts for her three nephews. When opening the gifts they would often say things like "I don't really like this." or "This isn't what I wanted." The aunt's feelings were definitely hurt by these remarks. The parents did not step in to help their sons learn that these types of responses were completely inappropriate.



At another holiday gathering children were wildly opening gifts without paying much attention to who the gift was from never mind actually thanking the person for the gift. The children threw aside each gift and anxiously started tearing the wrapping from the next gift. Again the parents failed to set up appropriate rules or expectations for the gift opening.

It's critical to teach our children how to politely handle situations involving gifts. It can be helpful for parents to sit down with their kids ahead of time and discuss the importance of showing their thankfulness. Discussing and practicing what to say under various situations can help prepare children to act graciously even when receiving a gift they really aren't excited about. It can also be helpful to agree on a gentle reminder signal, like a light touch on the ear, if children forget to say thanks.

Sometimes parents express appreciation for something their children have received instead of guiding their children to saying thank you. When parents do this, children do not learn that it is their responsibility to say thank you for things they've received. Children who do not learn to show these basic courtesies are often disrespectful in a number of other ways.

The holidays provide many opportunities for children to practice expressing their appreciation. This holiday season give your children the gift of learning to express their gratitude!

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