

Teaching Children to Express Gratitude

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How are you teaching your kids to show gratitude? Training your children to say "please" and "thank you" is essential. This basic social skill is critical in showing respect for others.

It takes plenty of prompting and reminders when your kids are young. It is worth the effort. Developing the skill of showing appreciation will benefit your kids. Expressing gratitude is crucial in maintaining relationships.

Showing a Lack of Appreciation

It can be challenging for kids to consider other people's feelings. Part of showing genuine appreciation involves being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. When children have not fully developed this skill, it can cause problems.

For example, one aunt explained how hard she worked to find special gifts for her three nephews. When opening the gifts, they said things like "I don't really like this." and "This isn't what I wanted." The aunt's feelings were hurt by their comments. Unfortunately, the parents did not step in to help their sons learn that their remarks were completely inappropriate.

At another holiday gathering, children were wildly opening gifts. They were not paying much attention to who the gift was from, never mind thanking the person for the gift. The children threw aside each gift before anxiously tearing the wrapping from the next gift. These parents failed to set up appropriate guidelines for the gift opening.

Setting Expectations

Sometimes you know your kids will be receiving gifts for either their birthday or a holiday. In this case, take time to discuss your expectations beforehand. You may want to role play so your child has practice ahead of time.

What should your child do if the gift giver is present? Will your child say thank you, give the person a hug or do something else to express thanks? Let your child choose how to express their gratitude in a way that is comfortable and appropriate.

Some parents will have their child open one gift and then take a picture of their child with the gift and the person who gave the gift. These pictures are wonderful to include in a thank you note or text.

What should your child do if the gift giver is not present? Will they write a thank you note, draw a picture to send or call the person? There are many ways to acknowledge the gift. The important thing is that your child find a way to express their gratitude.



How about the situation where your child has been invited over to a friend's house? How will they express their thanks when it is time to leave? Ask your child to tell you in their own words how they will handle this.

Being Gracious

Your kids will receive gifts that thrill them. They will also receive gifts that are not something they desired. It's critical to teach your children how to politely handle both situations. Discussing and practicing what to say under various situations helps prepare your kids to act graciously.

What might you tell your kids to do in the situation where they receive a gift they really aren't excited about? Discuss how the gift giver might feel if your child says something negative about the gift. What can they say instead? How can they express gratitude? If the gift giver is right there, it might be a simple thank you with a hug. Your child can always thank the person for their thoughtfulness in giving the gift.

What if your kids forget to say thank you? It is helpful to agree on a gentle reminder signal ahead of time. For example, you might lightly touch your child on the ear as a reminder.

Avoid expressing appreciation for something on behalf of your children. Instead guide them to saying thank you. You want your kids to 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 many other ways.

Birthdays and holidays provide many opportunities for children to practice expressing their appreciation. Be sure to give your children the gift of learning to express their gratitude!

Kathy Slattengren is a noted parenting speaker, trainer and founder of Priceless Parenting. [Priceless Parenting](#) provides an [online parenting class](#) which teaches effective discipline techniques for positively dealing with misbehavior.

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