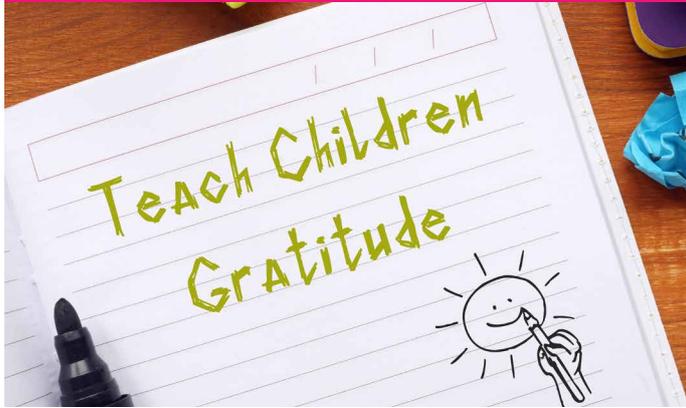


ParentBrief



Raising kids with gratitude

As parents, we model the behaviour we hope our kids will adopt as their own. Research tells us that gratitude is a learned behaviour, not an inherently natural one. So for our kids to look outside their world and be grateful for small things, it's up to us to role model some thankfulness. Learning an attitude of gratitude can help to give our kids a very positive outlook, and if we're not role modelling gratitude as parents, what does it mean to our kids when they're expected to be thankful? Please and thank you is a good start, but understanding the concept of gratitude as a way of viewing the world, will take practise on our part, and theirs...

Gimme, gimme, gimme

It's a sad fact, but true, that we live in a society of instant gratification. Our Western consumer culture says we can have everything... now... this minute... and if we can't we're led to believe we are somehow deprived. Most kids understand that the world revolves around them. And why wouldn't it? They're mostly catered to by adults, many are made comfortable with material goods, and an increasing number entertained by technology. For kids it's all happening, and unless encouraged to be appreciative, we can't blame them for thinking the world owes them, which unfortunately means they may also grow up with a sense of entitlement.

Getting vs giving

Kids are rarely into delayed gratification any more than many of us adults. With a click of the mouse, stuff is ordered and delivered, and it's unthinkable (to most kids and many parents) that a child has a birthday party minus presents. But birthdays are a good example of an occasion where, with a bit of effort on our part, we can encourage our kids to change the focus from getting to giving. For example, they could:

- write one thing they like about the person they're inviting, on the invitation
- hand make a small present of appreciation to those invited to the party
- write thankyou notes or emails and
- we can put a cap on the amount of money others should spend on our child

Appreciate the small stuff

Gratitude works like a muscle. The more we flex it, the stronger it gets. Raising kids with gratitude is a two-way deal. We model, they learn. Getting their head around being thankful and grateful can be quite complex for little kids, so we can start with the basics of please and thank you, and gradually work up from there.

- thank kids often for cooperating, showing care or thinking of others
- encourage a 'thankful' vocabulary and work gratitude into daily conversation
- volunteer as a family
- keep a lid on pocket money and encourage giving to a trusted charity of choice
- suggest kids donate clothes they've outgrown to others less fortunate
- downplay presents at festive times and concentrate more on family traditions
- share successes and achievements and thank those who have supported
- encourage generosity and sharing

Gratitude, as a way of thinking, supports optimism and resilience. Kids who appreciate the small stuff are less likely to be defeated by adversity or dwell on the fact that life is unfair. Stopping every now and then to reflect on what's good about our day, helps to remind us (and our kids) that it is what it is and there will always be things in life over which we have absolutely no control. And that's OK. Because every day has so much on offer... and even more to be grateful for.