

How and Why to Thank Our Children

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The Thanksgiving season is the perfect time to express appreciation and gratitude to some of the most important people in our lives: Our children. Regularly thanking your child can improve his or her self-esteem and sets the example to express gratitude as a sincere habit.

MODELING AND EXPECTATIONS

I grew up with the understanding that we should always express appreciation to strangers, family members and friends, and even after 50 years, I *still* thank my mother for *every* little thing she does for me. I also make it a habit to thank the children in my life. I thank them when they hold or open doors, pass something to me and remember to say “thank you!” In turn, I insist that they *too* understand that saying “thank you” is a family expectation. I use the “three strikes” rule and explain that there will be a consequence if they don’t say “thank you” after a third and final warning. When we teach children to express appreciation, they learn to notice others’ contributions, which can lead to humility, sincerity and ultimately higher self-esteem.

Read on to discover several creative opportunities and strategies for expressing thanks to your children, who can, in turn, can learn from this positive modeled behavior to express thanks to those in their lives.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SAY “THANK YOU” TO YOUR CHILDREN

For Their *Gift of Assuming or Sharing Responsibility*: One of many opportunities to express appreciation to our children is when they demonstrate their growing maturity by assuming or sharing family responsibilities. This can include completing an assigned chore without being reminded; initiating assistance without being asked; responding positively when they are asked to do something; or demonstrating dependability.

For Their *Gift of Positively Representing Your Family or Serving as a Role Model*: When our children act as “leaders” or otherwise make the family proud, that is a gift deserving of thanks! This could include exhibiting good or improved behavior at school or in the community; responding appropriately during a heated incident; volunteering to help an elderly, ill or disabled neighbor; or doing voluntary community service.

For Their *Gift of Their Value to Your Family*: Provide opportunities for your child to be an “expert” or to teach or help you. If you are watching a movie as a family, ask your child to explain why the actor responded the way he did. Ask your child questions about history or science, and encourage him or her to “Google it” to help you “discover” the answer. Children helping younger siblings by reading with them or helping them get dressed always helps the family and should be recognized! Solicit your child’s opinion on simple things like what to make for dinner, then try to follow through with his or her suggestions.

WAYS TO SAY “THANK YOU” TO YOUR CHILDREN

High-5s, fist bumps, pats on the back, hugs and quality time set aside just for parent and child are probably the easiest ways to say, “thank you,” but here are a few more ideas:

Spoken Words:

- Publicly and verbally praise and recognize children for their “gifts” (see above).
- An over-the-top “Congratulations!” via applause or a surprise standing ovation when a child enters the room would not be expected but would be remembered.
- As a part of the Thanksgiving meal, start a new tradition of taking turns thanking each family member for a particular or general contribution to the family.

Written Words:

- Slip a handwritten note in your child’s book bag or lunchbox, or write a note on his or her bathroom/bedroom mirror. Place the note in a different place each time and date it since you don’t when your child might discover it.
- A low-cost or even an extravagant card that reads, “Thank you,” “I’m proud of you,” “Special Daughter,”* “Special Son,”* or “You’re simply special”* would be a forever-cherished item!

Gifts and Tokens:

- Make homemade coupons (i.e., “This coupon is good for two scoops of ice cream!”).
- If your child did not earn a trophy/medal for an activity but put forth an award-winning effort, visit a thrift store or yard sale and purchase a trophy or plaque. Next, go to any local trophy shop and have a customized plate affixed. *Voila!* A new trophy! While you’ll save lots of money, your child will find this “priceless!”

The Knox County Schools Family and Community Engagement Department and Family Resource Center wish each family a very Happy Thanksgiving, and ***thank you*** for reading our monthly articles!

*The first 10 parents to request one of these special cards via email will be sent one via U.S. mail to present to their child! Please be specific in your request (son or daughter). Cards that are not gender specific, however, may be sent if supplies are limited. Contact Tracey Matthews at tracey.matthews@knoxschools.org, to request your card.