

## The Gift of Gratitude

It's likely that in the last 8 months you have been met with some unique personal and family challenges due to the pandemic. As we continue to journey through these uncertain times, the practice of gratitude may be one way to help navigate.

### **What is gratitude?**

According to one definition, gratitude is a quality of being thankful; a readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness. Continued research in psychology and neuroscience indicates that there are many proven psychological, physical, and social benefits of being grateful, for both adults and children. Practicing gratitude can fundamentally impact how people cope with stress and can help build stronger relationships. *What are you grateful for in this very moment?*

**Gratitude puts situations into perspective!** When we can see the good, it becomes more difficult to complain and stay stuck. Did you know regularly practicing gratitude can re-wire the brain's neuropathways for happiness and decrease anxious or depressive thoughts

Biologically, practicing gratitude can increase the amount of oxytocin released in our body. Oxytocin acts as an anti-inflammatory for our heart; it relaxes our blood vessels and helps us positively embrace stress. Feeling appreciation and recognizing gratitude have been shown to induce a feeling of relaxation. Practicing gratitude can reduce excess cortisol in your body by 23% which helps decrease harmful strain on your brain and vital organs.

**Gratitude helps us realize what we already have.** Practicing gratitude helps switch our focus from what we are lacking or wish for, and instead appreciate our current reality. Higher levels of gratitude are associated with an improved sense of well-being, stronger social ties, better school performance, and lower levels of depression. Being intentionally grateful can help children practice empathy, a critical part of social and emotional development.

Given all the great benefits of practicing gratitude, how can you encourage gratitude within your family and in your school?

1. **Small changes create big results!** Spend 10 seconds a day finding one small thing you can be grateful for. It can be as simple as “I’m thankful I’m taking these 10 seconds”. Challenge yourself to find one small thing, even on a bad day.
2. **Habits are encouraged when we feel good about what we’ve done.** Notice how you feel after your grateful moment. Are you glad you at least made the effort? Do you feel a slight shift in your mood?
3. **Spread the joy.** Can you let someone know that you appreciate them? A meaningful ‘thank you’ may do. Can you encourage your family to discuss their favorite part of the day, along with the challenges they experienced?
4. **Keep on challenging yourself!** Be creative in finding ways to express gratitude to yourself and to others. You may find even more to be grateful for.

**Check out:** 

Take a Gratitude Survey:

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take\\_quiz/gratitude](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/gratitude)

Short Video explaining the benefits of Gratitude:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMd1CcGZYwU>

Ideas to practice gratitude for kids: <https://www.speechbuddy.com/blog/parents-corner/speech-buddies-parents-corner-games-that-build-gratitude-during-the-holidays/>

Research from University of Chicago

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17439760.2018.1497688>