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FOR FAMILIES

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Teaching children to be thankful

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❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Written by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant.

In this world of over-indulgence and instant gratification, the Thanksgiving season is a good time to consider how to teach your children to be thankful. Believe it or not, gratefulness doesn't come naturally to children. It's your job as parents to instill a sense of gratitude in your children.

- ❖ **Set an example.** Realize that you must model the behavior you expect from your children. Give children a sincere expression of gratitude when they do something kind for you or someone else. Then let them see you showing gratitude as you go about your daily routine and with the people you encounter. Since children model your behavior, remember to mind your attitude. In large part, this will determine whether your children adopt a positive or negative outlook. An upbeat attitude can help children learn to be thankful for the little joys each day, while a negative one does just the opposite.
- ❖ **Expect gratitude.** While most children are good at being thankful for large things, don't let them off the hook with the small things. Remind them to say, "thank you" for the milk you pour or for helping them in small ways. Children who are reminded about "thank you" manners at home will eventually not need reminders in social situations and in school.
- ❖ **Express gratitude.** Incorporate in your daily conversation the things you are grateful for. When you visit the zoo, comment, "We are so lucky to have such a nice zoo in our city." When the weather is nice comment, "I am so grateful the weather is beautiful today so we can play in the yard." Make sure you are telling waitresses and grocery clerks "thank you" for their help.
- ❖ **Give to others.** Share the experience of helping others with your children. Empathy is a learned behavior, so as you're donating food to the hungry or clothes and toys to the needy, talk with your children about how they would feel if they didn't have those things. Take the next step and let your children help serve others when possible.
- ❖ **Establish thankfulness traditions.** Don't just be thankful at Thanksgiving. Regularly make family lists of things for which you are grateful. Use the dinner table to teach. Whether it's being thankful for daily blessings, thanking the person who fixed the dinner, or thanking each other for love, meal time is a great time to focus on how fortunate you are. Using this family time to show gratitude will surely spill over into your children's everyday lives.
- ❖ **Send thank-you notes.** Teach children to send thank-you notes, or make phone calls for gifts or acts of kindness. Children who are too young to write can decorate thank you notes with stickers

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and their names. Older children can send e-mails or make phone calls. A simple “thank you” from a child goes a long way in acknowledging the kindness of everyday things. These simple words can change the next generation into a more appreciative, gentler, less self-centered generation going forward.

- ❖ **Encourage saving.** Teach your children about money and saving for things they want. When children put their own time and sweat equity into saving up for what they want, it will certainly help them think about whether the item is worth their hard work and grateful when they have saved enough to buy it.
- ❖ **Assign chores.** Have your children do age-appropriate chores. Telling children how hard it is to do laundry, cook, clean, rake leaves is a lot different than actually letting them do it themselves. They will see how much time and energy is involved in the upkeep of the house and hopefully appreciate and be grateful for the hard work you do. When they do a good job on their chores, tell them thank you.