



Gratitude Through Shared Activities

As we sit before our holiday meals, we may feel grateful for a variety of things: a happy family, robust health, a loving partner, or even, in this current economic situation, a job. Often the last thing on our minds is the stranger who kindly held a door for us or the server who brought us dinner one night.

Even so, most parents are diligent about teaching their children to say "please" and "thank you." This reflects simple good manners. But do these words really teach children an understanding of what gratitude is and how it positively impacts our mental health, daily attitude and even physical well-being? It's challenging enough to teach children the concept of gratitude. That challenge is even greater when addressing the topic with a special needs child.

When showing gratitude, it's important to help children connect doing grateful things with positive feelings. With

special needs children, this is particularly helpful as understanding gratitude is an abstract concept. When we do activities together with a child, it's easier for him to understand and want to repeat the good feelings. This is re-enforced when we make the connection between the act of gratitude and how it makes us, the child and the recipient, feel.

How do we do that? Be creative in helping your child understand how gratitude makes us feel good. For example, when you're doing a grateful activity, have the child draw a picture about how it makes him feel or have a chart with pictorial representations of feelings. Helping him to understand what part gratitude plays in your lives is a shared activity. Below are some ways in which you can work together.

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Easy Ways to Practice:

1. Write a heartfelt thank you to someone who has done something nice for you.
2. When it snows, shovel your walkway and the neighbor's and discuss, "Why are we doing this?"
3. Share some cookies that you just baked together.
4. For the holidays, make homemade gifts and give them in person.
5. Hug frequently. Giving a hug is a simple way to show gratitude and we can all do it.

Our relationships with others are what enhance our lives and make us happy. By practicing gratitude as a family and doing kind gestures together, everyone benefits, especially when we're making the connection between showing gratitude and feeling good.