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Resources for Families

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Teaching children to be thankful

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. Since thankfulness doesn't come naturally to children, it's your job as parents to help them feel gratitude.

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. In large part, your example 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.

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 good things that happen in daily life, 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 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 help them feel grateful when they have saved enough to buy it.

Assign chores

Have your children do age-appropriate chores. When children experience personally how much time and energy is involved in the upkeep of the house, they'll be more likely to appreciate and be grateful for the hard work you do. When they do a good job on their chores, tell them thank you.



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Talking with your children about the news

Why is it important to talk with your children about what they see on the news?

Newspapers, TV newscasts, cable news networks, news radio, and Web sites presenting graphic footage and accounts of the latest happenings in the world are being delivered right into our homes 24 hours a day. This constant barrage can be overwhelming for adults, but it can be especially confusing and frightening for young children.

As a parent, only you can decide what news is appropriate for your children. Used properly, the news can teach children many positive things about the world. Knowledge and understanding of news events can teach children a sense of belonging and social responsibility.

At the same time, the daily news can perpetuate stereotypes, confuse, anger and even frighten children. By talking with your children early and often about the stories and images to which they are exposed, you can help them better understand the world around them.

Explore the age appropriateness of the news you allow your children to see

Here are some generalizations to consider, but keep in mind they may not be true for all children. Preschool age children have a limited ability to discern the fantasy of an entertainment show from the reality of news. Children between the ages of six and ten may know the difference between fantasy and reality, but may lack perspective. Adolescents have a better understanding of fact and fiction and are expanding their own perspective on a daily basis, but their constant exposure to media and peers can lead to conflicting information and confusion.

Watch or read the news with your children

You will know what your children are being exposed to and can talk with them about it. If you see something that may be upsetting to your children, don't be afraid to strike up a conversation on the subject.

Create an open dialogue

The best way to make sure children know they are safe is to talk with them about what they see and hear. Additionally, let your children know not to be ashamed or afraid to talk with you whenever they see something they don't understand. Use the news as an opportunity to discuss tough issues with your children.

Let your children know the difference between news and reality

Make sure your children know that just because they saw it on the news, it doesn't mean it is likely to happen to them.

Acknowledge your children's fears

It is important to reassure children that there are people working to make sure their personal world will remain safe.

Explore the facts with your children

At times it may be necessary to provide your children with more factual information than is provided in a brief news report.

Acknowledge the complexity of the news

Even the most informed parent is sure to have difficulties explaining why people fight wars, or why politicians don't always tell the truth. It's important to let children know that the news and the world are very complex, and that greater perspective will come with age and continued communication.

Select child-friendly news sources for your children

All news is not created equal. Take care to select good news sources for your children.

Balance your children's news diet

The same way a nutritious diet, rich with plenty of fruits and vegetables, helps promote healthy growth for children's bodies, a balanced news diet, rich in communication and the perspective parents provide, promotes growth for their minds.



Helping Your Children Be Better Students

Show your kids - learning is important

Talk about how valuable education is and how it can benefit the future of your children. Learn something new every day, and make a game of it with your family. Make homework a family activity, and participate by checking in and helping out. When a family member's grades are suffering, show them that the whole family cares and wants them to feel good about their schoolwork. When your children succeed, make sure they are congratulated.

Set realistic goals

Be reasonable. Don't expect miracles to happen overnight. Academic progress is a slow but steady process. Help your children understand what they're trying to accomplish and that there are no shortcuts. Improving their grades is a goal worth reaching, not a punishment. Allow your children to suggest solutions to their problems. This will empower them and give them a say in their educational destiny.

Be a mentor

Be available for your children. If you're willing to sit down and help them get through a tough assignment, they'll be more willing, too. Remember that learning is about encountering what a person doesn't already know. That can be scary! Be patient and responsive in helping your children master new skills. Your children will be receptive to learning more quickly if they can count on you to help no matter what the problem.

Make learning fun

Your children might be bored. Turn homework and study into a game. Make some flash cards or purchase age-appropriate educational games. Get everyone in the family involved.

Know when to ask for help

No matter what, establishing an environment where learning is a fun and important is a great thing to do. But sometimes it's not enough. Some children just don't respond well when mom and dad try to help with school work. Know when to turn to a tutor or to check out any of the numerous programs affiliated with local schools and libraries. If your children have

consistent struggles with school work, talk with your child's teacher. A professional through the school jurisdiction will identify challenges and give suggestions for how to help children learn at their full potential.

Consider the educational advantages of computers and the Internet

As computer and Internet technologies advance, they occupy an increasingly significant role in our lives. As a parent, you may rely upon your computer to track your finances, get your news, or e-mail your friends and colleagues. Perhaps you do not remember how you ever got by without your computer.

These high-tech tools are just as important for your children. While it is true that the Internet provides access to questionable video games or other inappropriate content, it is also a gateway to quality educational resources, learning-enhancing games and homework help.

If you are using online resources, it is crucial that you, the parent, evaluate these sites yourself before giving your children the green light for their use. The Internet is as large as it is valuable, and some of the resources it houses can provide inaccurate or inappropriate information.

Use educational computer games

The Internet is a treasure chest of fun, interactive programs designed to help children improve reading skills, complete math problems, build memory, or simply enhance hand-eye coordination. While some games must be purchased, others are free. Again, you should always preview any sites your children visit, and evaluate them for age and skill-level appropriateness.

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