

There's Something About Gratitude

11/24/2020

Hi there! Welcome back. Lisa here. Hopefully last week's post helped you breathe a little easier. While you're taking some deep breaths and centering yourself, now's a great time to think about what you're grateful for. We're entering the holiday season and while it may look different than it has in years past, there is still a sense of busyness and frenzy that accompanies the season. If your typical holiday plans have been disrupted, it can feel like there's nothing to celebrate. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Even if your life feels unsettled, there are still things to be grateful for.



Research has consistently shown the benefits of practicing gratitude or developing an "attitude of gratitude." Consistent practice of gratitude has been related to better relationships, improved physical and mental health, improved self-care, better resilience, increased empathy, decreased aggression, decreased social comparison, and even improved sleep.

Gratitude is not a magic pill. You won't necessarily feel better immediately or develop a permanent rosy outlook. The benefits of gratitude are cumulative, so you'll notice that you feel better over time. It will also become easier to bring to mind those people and things for which you are grateful.

Especially at this time of year, it seems like everyone is talking about gratitude. But what is it? Is gratitude just a matter of making a list of things you are thankful for and then moving on to your next task? Is it just a way of tricking yourself into believing that everything is okay even when it's not?

Nope! Gratitude is not a matter of looking for a silver lining or appreciating suffering. Instead, it's a practice of recognizing and then actively appreciating who and what adds to your life. If you're going through a difficult time, gratitude may involve appreciating the people who are helping you through that hard time or feeling thankful for the resources you have that are making things just a bit easier. As human beings, it's impossible to ignore negative events for long. Gratitude allows us to recognize and appreciate the good that exists alongside the bad.

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The miracle of gratitude
is that it shifts your
perception to such an
extent that it changes the
world you see.


DR. ROBERT HOLDEN

Hopefully as you read this, you're starting to think about some things you feel grateful for. If you're like most people, the first things that come to mind are the people and things that feel like a "given" to be grateful for- like your family, your friends, your home, and other big things like that. Those are typically pretty easy to access when we start our "gratitude lists."



But what happens when your kids are getting on your nerves, you and your partner are arguing about something, and you just found out that your house needs the roof repaired? Gratitude may feel kind of hard to come by in those moments. That's when you look to the little things. You may have enjoyed a delicious cup of coffee this morning, you may have gotten everything you needed at the grocery store in only one trip, you may have gotten to take walk today because the weather was great. See where I'm going here? The little things are also a great place to focus our gratitude. Most of the time we're not having huge accomplishments or major life events that are clearly moments for gratitude. Being able to recognize and feel grateful for the small things can sometimes make all the difference.

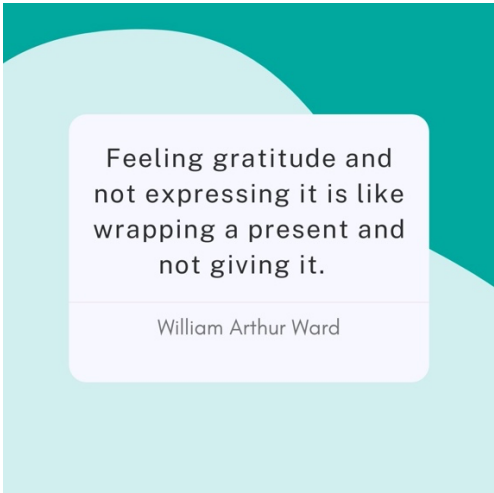
An issue that comes up for a lot of the parents and kids that Sarah and I work with is how they can practice gratitude. For many people, just making a list is not a good fit. This is partly because making a list can feel like a chore- just something to check off your daily To Do's. Gratitude is a feeling, so you have to do something to access that feeling. Instead of just listing off *who or what* you're grateful for, think about *why* you feel gratitude. Then just sit with that feeling for a minute. Go ahead, try it now. Write, think, or say out loud, "I am grateful for _____ because _____. The "because" is important as it allows us to access the *feeling* of gratitude. **Really pay attention to how gratitude *feels*. Once you're able to generate that feeling in yourself, you'll be better able to activate gratitude in the moment.**



Be thankful for what you have, you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you'll never, ever have enough.

OPRAH WINFREY

While thinking about and feeling gratitude will have benefits for you in the long run, it's also important to share your gratitude with others. How nice does it feel when someone thanks you for something and you can tell they genuinely mean it? Sharing gratitude lets others know that they're important to you and that you recognize the positive ways they impact your life. It also strengthens your connections with others, which improves your relationships and your sense of well-being. When you're thinking about and feeling gratitude for other people, also take moment to think about how you can show them or tell them that you're grateful. Sharing gratitude doesn't have to be a big production. Simply saying thank you and meaning it is often enough. Other times, you'll want to say or do more. The key at those times is to be specific- share exactly why you're grateful for them.



Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

William Arthur Ward

So, as the holiday season gets underway and as we all continue to cope with everything that is going on in the world, remember to take some time for gratitude. You'll feel better for having done so.

Thank you for taking the time to read this post. Sarah and I appreciate you for supporting our efforts and for using the information we share to make your lives and the lives of your family members healthier and happier.



Check out Greater Good in Action at UC Berkeley for some helpful gratitude practices that you and your family can use: <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/#filters=gratitude>