

Encouraging an Attitude of Gratitude

12/20/22

Sarah here. We hope you read last week's blog and that you and your family are getting into the spirit of giving- whatever that looks like for you. This week, we're focusing on a natural counterpart of giving: gratitude.



Oxford Languages defines gratitude as “the quality of being thankful” as well as “readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.” Gratitude isn’t just about an emotion- it’s more of a cognitive-affective state. We think or perceive something positive, we connect that benefit to the source, and we feel a positive emotion. There is a body of research in the field of positive psychology that supports the physiological, social, and emotional benefits of gratitude.

While research uses the term “gratitude,” Lisa and I both agree that the terminology doesn’t work for everybody. It isn’t that people don’t *feel* grateful. It’s just that talking about gratitude or doing a gratitude journal may feel daunting to some. That’s okay. But, since the concept of gratitude is so valuable, rather than just dismissing the whole thing, consider what language *does* work for you and your family. I personally find that “appreciation” resonates more for me than gratitude. Others may feel more comfortable with thinking in terms of being “thankful.”

When it comes to practicing gratitude, here again, I want you to think outside of the box. There’s probably the way you *want* yourself or your family to express gratitude. This may include hand-written personalized thank you cards or—if you’re thinking about self-reflection—

it may mean structured daily gratitude journaling. Those ideas are fine- great, in fact. I *love* getting real mail- hand-written notes are the best! And empirically, we know (thanks to Martin Seligman, Ph.D. and his years of research in positive psychology) that structured gratitude journaling has immense benefits.

But in real life, sometimes these practices just aren't feasible. It may be that you're short on time, long on stress, or you're trying to encourage gratitude in your kids, who may be less committed to the goal than you are. Rather than throwing out the whole idea of practicing gratitude, you could expand your scope of gratitude practices to include some new ideas. If you're struggling to get your kids to sit down and write thank you cards, maybe you guys could make short audio messages, videos or write texts to friends and family instead. If you want to do gratitude journaling but haven't found the time, bring the activity into dinnertime, so everyone can share something they're grateful for. Rather than just focusing on presents, get your family to focus on actions, small gestures and things that were said (or even left unsaid). Gratitude isn't about adding stress or creating tension for you and your family. It's about recognizing the people, actions, events, and things that you genuinely appreciate. And remember that gratitude—like giving—is something we can practice all year long.

