

An Attitude of Gratitude

Teaching Your Children To Appreciate The Goodness In Life

By Mira Temkin

As Thanksgiving approaches, it's the time of year when our thoughts turn to appreciating the many bounties of life -- an appropriate time to "count your blessings." How can you make the idea of gratitude more meaningful to your children now and throughout the year? Like most things you teach your children, they learn from example. How you express gratitude and set the right example remains a wonderful life lesson for them as they continue to grow.

"Living your own life with gratitude is the best way to teach your children to be appreciative," says Rae Luskin, a Deerfield, IL expressive arts teacher and author of the recently published, 'Art from My Heart,' a journal of self-discovery for families. She says there are many ways families can share their thoughtful blessings. "Help your children prepare for the holidays by creating an 'ABCs of Book of Gratitude.' From their siblings to a family pet to a favorite teacher, write down the things they would miss if they didn't have them. Each child should fill in a letter of the alphabet representing what they are grateful for... such as 'A is for Alex our dog, B is for the bread we eat, C is for Mrs. Cunningham, my teacher.' Inspire your children to include these things in your family's book. Then, read it at your Thanksgiving dinner and everyone will come away with a warm feeling of gratitude."

"Moving beyond your own blessings by showing appreciation to others in your community can

was only five kernels of corn. In order to commemorate these difficult times, families in New Eng-

water come out of the tap? It's an everyday thing for people here. Yet many people feel an overwhelming sense of amazement to have clean water in their house. When you understand that everything in your life is a special gift, you've taken your first step to increasing your own appreciation of life and passing that on to your children."

You can never start too early to teach your children the value of gratitude. Even the youngest child can learn to say those two little words to show their appreciation. Most important, don't overlook the thoughtful things your children do on a daily basis. Be sure to say "thank you" when they complete a task or do a chore that you appreciate.



Children at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El Highland Park show off their charity boxes they made for a school project.

really make a difference," she continued. "Acknowledge people who clerk at a store, the bus driver, a server at Starbucks. One way to do this, which is featured in her book, is to create small business-size cards that say, 'I'm grateful to you for a job well done. Thank you.' Go out of your way to appreciate the efforts of others and your children will learn to embrace the art of appreciation themselves."

Five kernels of corn at your Thanksgiving table

During the hard winter before the first Thanksgiving, food was so scarce in some settlements, that the daily ration of food per person

land started the custom of putting five kernels of corn on each plate at their feast. To extend this custom at your own holiday table, use each kernel as a way of expressing each of things you're grateful for in your lives.

Do your children feel entitled?

Michelle Carchrae, creator of The Parent Vortex, a parenting blog and author of numerous parenting articles, feels that today's children often feel a sense of entitlement, which is a barrier to gratitude. She says, "If we think we're entitled to something, we're unlikely to appreciate it. How grateful do you feel when you see clean

ate. Appreciation works both ways.

"Practicing gratitude helps us change our brainwaves from noticing gaps and omissions," says parenting blogger Mary Beth Sammons, an award-winning journalist who writes about family life. "When you express irritation, you get more irritated. When you express appreciation, you become more grateful." Mary Beth also feels that learning how to connect with your children from a place of thankfulness can also mean guiding them to finding their own unique ways to express their thankfulness.

The magic word - "Let's"

One of the most powerful words

you can use with your children is the word, "let's" to teach the value of giving rather than receiving. During the holiday, say to your child, "Let's go to the food pantry and help fill the bags. They could really use our help and I'll bet you'll know just what kids your age would really like." Or suggest to your child, "Let's go buy a holiday gift for someone who doesn't have as much as you and we can donate it to "Toys for Tots." While you're directing the suggestion, it allows your child to add his own ideas. In situations like these, you'll have the chance to help your child participate in a kind and generous act.

Appreciation can be taught

With the bombardment on TV for the latest toys and games, it's no wonder children want everything. As parents, we want them to be

happy. But by indulging their every wish, we really are doing them a disservice. Children who get everything they want (and instantly!) can never appreciate what they already have. Getting one's wishes granted immediately doesn't make them more grateful or content. Yes, it takes determination and a thick skin to hold back and teach these important lessons to our children. But they'll learn to enjoy what they have instead of what they want.

Giving as a way to say "thank you"

Serving others in your community is a good way to acknowledge the blessings in your own life. Judaism believes that everyone must think of themselves as having more than they need. Even those with very little are obligated to find someone in greater need to share



what they have. Judaism also believes in "Tikkun Olam -- healing the world" which means that if we are blessed with abundance, it was

given to us to help others. In this day and age, it's not too difficult to find an organization that could use your family's help.

Places to volunteer

Here are some organizations you can contact to volunteer for a number of community service projects:

1-800 VOLUNTEER- ORG - Go to www.1800volunteer.org and find places to volunteer in your community.

The Volunteer Center of Northwest Suburban Chicago - Call (847) 228-1320, www.volunteerinfo.net

South Suburban PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) - Call 708-754-4357, www.sspads.org

Loaves and Fishes, Naperville - www.loaves-fishes.org, 630.355.3663

Frankfort Area Jaycees -- For those 18 - 40 who want to make a difference in their community. Information, call Ken Blank at 815-922-0245 or visit www.frankfort-area-jaycees.org.

A great family activity is to pack food baskets for the holiday and donate to homeless shelters. If your church doesn't have a program like this, start one.

As you gather your family around the table this Thanksgiving, let them know that sharing your bounty with others is the true meaning of the season. May you count your many blessings!

Thank You!