



PARENT SENSE BY VICKI CURRAN, ED.S, LPC, NCC

Gratitude can be taught

As the candy wrappers and jack-o-lanterns fade away with the beginning of November, the topic of “thankfulness” and what that means comes to mind. Gratitude (or a lack of gratitude) is something all parents encounter during the process of raising children, because children are self-focused by nature. In order to survive as infants, their default mode has to be “satisfy me.” As a result, putting others first and being grateful is not a natural intuition. But the good news is, it can be taught!

As parents, we encourage our kids to practice sports,

musical instruments and their parts in the school play but we should also make sure they get to practice “being a good person.” As Michele Borba, EdD says, “We are good at practicing everything but humanity.” And because today’s digitally-driven, individualistic society makes everything “less human,” cultivating positive qualities such as kindness, empathy and gratefulness are needed now more than ever.

So what’s a parent to do? Here are a few small things that can actually make a big difference:

Create a thankfulness routine. This can happen daily or weekly — maybe every night before going to bed or at the dinner table one night a week. Have kids talk about one thing they are thankful for that day or week and have a conversation about why they are grateful.

When practicing a thankfulness routine, encourage children to look beyond “things.” Encourage your child to find gratitude in more than material items. For example, they can be thankful for the warm day that allowed them to stay at the playground after school

with their friends. If they are thankful for a material item that day, have them talk about who gave it to them and the thoughtfulness that went into choosing a gift your child would enjoy.

Talk about the process involved in the things they have. Thinking about the process helps prevent taking things for granted. The milk they drink is possible because a farmer gets up early to take care of the cows so they can get their milk. Someone else packages the milk. Someone else brings it to the store. Someone else

puts it on the shelf where we can then go and buy it.

The warm house they come into after being outside in the cold is possible because parents work hard to provide comfortable shelter for them. It helps them to think about the effort that goes into even the “simplest of things” and how they can be thankful for all the people willing to do their part.

Get them excited about giving. We all know how good it feels to give someone else a gift that we know they’ll love. Have children come up with some ideas of things they could give to someone this holiday season. Start with people they know and extend it to giving to others who are in need. Encourage them to shift their focus from “getting” to “giving” this year by getting them excited about making someone else’s day better.

When children use their time, energy, and talents to help make the world a better place, they feel more connected to all that is around them. When they see others who are in need of help and when they receive gratitude from others they have helped, they will learn about the beautiful exchange of connectedness. In this country, and in particular this area of the country, we are blessed with many things. Sharing your family’s good fortune with others is a way to demonstrate for our children how much they have to be thankful for!

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.