

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE *for Iowans*

### Clippings



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A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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**For Immediate Release**

### Creating Grateful Children

*Lori Hayungs, human sciences specialist in family life*

The holiday season is a time when parents dutifully remind their children to be grateful. “Did you remember to say ‘thank you?’” becomes the customary parental command between parent and child. Many traditions involve gift giving and gift receiving. The most troubling behaviors to parents is the frenzy of gift grabbing, searching, ripping and tearing with little attention paid to the gift itself or the gift giver. The child’s greedy quest for more ensues and without intervention, a child may morph into a materialistic monster. The experience leaves parents dazed and wondering how to inspire old-fashioned gratitude and graciousness.

How important is gratitude? Psychologist Nansook Park and Christopher Peterson analyzed parental descriptions of their children’s strengths and found that gratitude had the strongest relationship to life satisfaction. Researchers at Berkley’s Greater Good for Science Center have found that grateful young adolescents are happier, more positive, have greater social support and are more satisfied with school, family and friends. Additionally, research shows that gratitude plays a major role in an adult’s well-being and success. Therefore, we know that gratitude is an important part in helping children create, maintain and strengthen relationships.

Researchers at Greater Good for Science Center suggest, “Gratitude is born of a loving connection and grows from a loving connection.” Gratitude develops when parents are able to recognize and respond to their child’s needs and interests while satisfying the child with love. It’s through this exchange that gratitude can develop.

Helping others and being generous are two important strategies for creating grateful kids. If children are encouraged to help out or lend a hand and possibly utilize their strengths, the result will be a child who is



more connected to those they are helping. The child will develop and nurture friendships and relationships. Parents play an integral role by encouraging thoughtfulness, thanking others often and recognizing a child's effort to be helpful, giving and cooperative. Children will learn through parent's kind actions and behaviors that relationships and people matter.

Join us this month as we blog about strategies that can encourage gratitude in children. We will look for ideas to share that may help you learn to model and teach gratitude. We will learn ways that you can help your child to use their strengths to be thankful and kind to others. We will reflect on our own actions and learn mindfully how to teach the importance of relationships through thoughtfulness and acts of kindness. As always we look forward to hearing from you and hear examples how you have made gratitude a priority.

Follow the Science of Parenting blog at [www.scienceofparenting.org](http://www.scienceofparenting.org). ISU Extension and Outreach specialists share and discuss research-based information and resources to help parents rear their children. Parents can join in the conversation and share thoughts and experiences, as well as how they handle parenting responsibilities.

Are you more of a texting machine? The Science of Parenting blog is also available via text message. It's another way you can access research-based parenting information from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. It's easy. Simply text the keyword "sciparent" to 95577. Sometimes the messages will include links to photos or videos hosted on the Science of Parenting website. Participants can text their replies, as well.

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