

Mental Health Matters

November 2023



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The Importance of Practicing Gratitude and Celebrating Small Victories

November is National Gratitude month, and the beginning of the season when many people may begin to think about what they are grateful for in their life. While it is nice to count your blessings during the holidays, practicing gratitude for the big and small things in your life can benefit your life all year round.

Research has shown that consciously practicing gratitude can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. In fact, studies have found that a single act of thoughtful gratitude produces an immediate 10% increase in happiness, and a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms. These effects disappeared within three to six months, which reminds us to practice gratitude over and over.

Practicing gratitude is also great protective factor. The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) curriculum defines a protective factor as “something that decreases the chances of a person being adversely affected by a circumstance or disorder.” This protection can help in a variety of circumstances, including mental health challenges like depression and anxiety, or substance use challenges.

Gratitude and celebration can also help you tend to your emotional wellbeing. The MHFA curriculum lists out the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) eight dimensions of wellbeing: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social and spiritual. Each aspect of your wellbeing is equally important, and practicing gratitude is just one way you can tend to your emotional wellbeing on the journey to care for your whole self.

You can begin to practice gratitude by thinking of what you’re thankful for — like family and friends, your home or a beautiful sunny day — rather than being consumed by what is going wrong. Writing these thoughts down or saying them aloud can even help you stay positive during difficult times.

Another important aspect of practicing gratitude is celebrating small victories. We often get caught up in celebrating large accomplishments — a new job, getting married, buying a house, etc. And while these things are certainly monumental and should be celebrated, it is equally important to celebrate the small moments of life. Sometimes, simply getting out on bed on a bad day can be cause for celebration!

But more often, our daily lives are full of distractions and stress, and we let our small achievements go unnoticed, even internally. Think about the past few days — what have you accomplished that went unnoticed? Did you cook a delicious meal, start a new book or chat with a loved one? Take a moment now to celebrate that, to express gratitude. Perhaps you might write it down in a journal.

Full article found at <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2022/11/practicing-gratitude/>





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How to Teach Children Gratitude

In a time when many middle school kids carry around \$600 phones that they take for granted, teaching gratitude can feel like an uphill battle. But despite the challenges you might face in helping kids feel grateful in a world that seems to value overabundance, it can be worthwhile.

Research and Evidence

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies¹ found that gratitude is linked to happiness in children by age 5. This means that instilling gratitude in your kids at a young age could help them grow up to be happier people.

According to a 2008 study published in the Journal of School Psychology², grateful children (ages 11 to 13) tend to be happier, more optimistic, and have better social support. They also report more satisfaction with their schools, families, communities, friends, and themselves. Grateful kids also tend to give more social support to others as well.

According to a 2011 study published in Psychological Assessment³, grateful teens (ages 14 to 19) are more satisfied with their lives, use their strengths to improve their communities, are more engaged in their schoolwork and hobbies, and have better grades. They've also been shown to be less envious, depressed, and materialistic than their less grateful counterparts.

It's true that much of the gratitude research focuses on adults, but the benefits of gratitude are numerous for everyone. A 2010 study published in Clinical Psychology Review⁴ linked gratitude to everything from improved psychological well-being to better physical health. Grateful people tend to sleep better and even live longer.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Positive Psychology⁵ found that grateful adults are happier and more hopeful. Gratitude was a better predictor of hope and happiness than other constructs, like forgiveness, patience, and even self-control.

Additionally, the study found that people who were grateful for things that happened to them in the past, felt happier in the present and more hopeful about their future. Perhaps giving your kids a childhood they feel grateful about now will help them reflect more on reasons to be grateful as an adult.

So clearly there are a lot of good reasons to help kids experience and express gratitude. Here are a few strategies that can help your kids feel more grateful.

Teach Your Child to Say Thank You

Encourage your child to say "Thank you" on a regular basis. Offer gentle reminders like, "Your brother let you go first. What should you say to him?" or "What do you say to Grandma for giving you a cookie?"

So even if it doesn't seem like genuine appreciation when your child needs a reminder, encouraging them to verbally express appreciation can be an important learning tool for genuine gratitude down the line.

You can also encourage your kids to write "thank you" notes to people who give them gifts or show them kindness. Your child might color a picture for a grandparent who purchased a birthday gift for them. Or you might encourage your teen to write a "thank you" letter to a special coach who has made an impact on their lives.

Full article found at <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-teach-children-gratitude-4782154>