Santa Paula Unified School District

Mental Health Matters

November 2026

Gratitude and Mental Health

Gratitude is the practice of recognizing and appreciating the positive things in our lives and the people around us. Research suggests that gratitude can positively influence our brain, emotional well-being, and physical health.



The Science Behind Gratitude

Practicing gratitude can influence how your brain functions. When we experience or express gratitude, the brain activates its reward system and releases important neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin. These chemical messengers help regulate mood, motivation, and feelings of happiness.

Gratitude also affects several areas of the brain:

- **Dopamine:** Helps create feelings of pleasure, motivation, and reward.
- **Serotonin:** Plays an important role in regulating mood and emotional well-being.
- **Prefrontal Cortex:** Supports decision-making, emotional regulation, and positive thinking.
- **Amygdala:** Helps process emotions and stress responses. Regular gratitude practices may help reduce reactivity to stressful situations.
- **Parasympathetic Nervous System:** Helps the body relax and recover by counteracting the fight-or-flight response.

Over time, consistently practicing gratitude may help strengthen positive thinking patterns and improve how we respond to everyday stress.

Benefits of Gratitude

Research suggests that regularly recognizing and expressing appreciation can positively influence our brain, emotional well-being, and physical health.

- **Creates a More Positive Mindset**
- **Reduces Stress**
- **Reduces Anxiety**
- **Supports Emotional Well-Being**
- **Builds Emotional Resilience**
- **Improves Focus and Motivation**
- **Supports Immune Health**
- **Promotes Better Sleep**
- **Strengthen Social Connections**
- **Supports Overall Well-Being**



Need Mental Health Support?

OPTUM EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) OFFERS **FREE CONFIDENTIAL HELP**

Call toll-free **888-444-8624** any time
OR
Go to **www.liveandworkwell.com** and browse as a guest using code **CSEBO**

OPTUM

This newsletter is brought to you by the Mental Health Counselors:

Liset Llerenas, LPCC:
LLlerenas@santapaulausd.org

Kandice Martinez, ASW:
Kmartinez@santapaulausd.org

Deborah Ujfalusy, LCSW:
DUjfalusy@santapaulausd.org



Ways to Practice Gratitude

- **Start your morning with gratitude:** Think of three to five things you appreciate.
- **Keep a gratitude journal:** Write down positive moments or things you are thankful for.
- **Give someone a shout-out:** Recognize a colleague or friend for their kindness, support, or hard work.
- **Say thank you:** Take a moment to let someone know their efforts are appreciated.
- **Celebrate small wins:** Acknowledge the little things that make your day better.
- **Practice self-appreciation:** Recognize your own strengths, accomplishments, and growth.

Gratitude doesn't mean every day is perfect or that we ignore life's challenges. It means taking a moment to recognize the good, even during difficult times. This week, pause and identify three things you are grateful for.

Practicing gratitude can support our mental well-being, shift our perspective, and remind us of the positive things in our lives. Remember, you don't have to navigate challenges alone. If you're feeling overwhelmed or struggling, reach out to someone you trust or a mental health professional.

Full Articles Found at:
https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/does-gratitude-rewire-your-brain/

Local and National Resources and Support

24 Hour Suicide Prevention Lines:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988 or (800) 273-8255

Suicide Prevention Crisis Line (877) 727-4747

National Hope line Network (800) SUICIDE or (800) 784-2433

California Youth Crisis Line (800) 843- 5200 –24 hours, bilingual
TEEN LINE (310) 855-4673 or text **TEEN** to 839863 – a teen-to-teen hotline with community outreach services, from 6pm-10pm PST daily. Text, email, and message board also available, with limited hours—visit http://teenlineonline.org for more information.

The Trevor Project (866) 488-7386 – a 24-hour crisis line that provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24. Visit www.thetrevorproject.org for more information.

In case of an Emergency:

911 For Immediate Support
Ventura County Crisis Team
(866) 998-2243 (24hrs)