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RAISING GRATEFUL CHILDREN

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Parents who demonstrate gratitude for the things and people in their lives have a better shot at cultivating that virtue in their children than those who don't, says Jeffrey Froh, an assistant professor in the graduate program in School-Community Psychology at Hofstra University who has studied the effects of counting blessings on sixth- and seventh-graders.

For instance, when was the last time your kids saw you write a thank-you note to a friend who did you a favor? Or how about the last time they overheard you telling your own parents, siblings or spouse how much you appreciate them?

Froh says he's already begun teaching his 10-month-old son to write thank-you notes to his grandparents and playmates - with a little help from Mom and Dad, of course. "His first one was at 3 months," Froh jokes, "and he's written tons."

If you model gratitude, over time your kids will "catch that grateful attitude," he says.

What else can you do? Froh offers these tips:

Watch your language. Speak words of gratitude, such as thanks, thankful, fortunate, blessing and gift.

Have your kids start a gratitude journal. Ask them to write down five things they're grateful for before they go to bed. You can make it a nightly activity you do together.

Use reminders. Leave a note in your child's lunchbox or text them and remind them to count their blessings or thank others - a teacher, friend or school janitor, for instance - for things they've done.

Notice grateful language and behavior in your kids. For example, say, "That was sweet of you to thank your friend for helping you with your homework. Good for you. I'm sure that made them feel good and made your friendship stronger." Don't just stress the politeness aspect of giving thanks, Froh says. "Gratitude is beyond manners; it's also about strengthening relationships and communities."

When kids reach a goal, help them identify who helped them achieve it. "Our individualistic culture instills in us a sense of 'I did this on my own.' That's hogwash!" Froh says. "Interdependence is integral for success. So if your kid wins the spelling bee, help them list all those who helped along the way."

Schedule a "gratitude visit." Ask your kids to think of someone - a parent, teacher, sibling or neighbor, for example - who helped them in some way but never received the thanks he or she deserved. Have them write a letter expressing their thanks, then go see the person and read the letter to them, he says. If the person is too far away for a face-to-face visit, have your child call him or her.

Be in the here and now. Take a walk with your kids and experience the things around you. Breathe in deeply. Smell the fresh cut grass. Feel the cool night air on your skin.

Encourage your kids to appreciate things bigger than themselves, such as God, the cosmos or nature.

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