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# Thanks to Gratitude!

By [Sherri Fisher](#) on November 5, 2009 – 4:58 pm [11 Comments](#)



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*Sherri writes on the 5th of each month, and her past articles are [here](#).*



"Thank You" sign

Did you know that over two thirds of happy experiences are relationship oriented? Gratitude is the feeling we experience when we perceive ourselves as the recipient of an intentional gift from another. In many ways, it is the ultimate positive emotion, and for most people, it expands their sense of well-being and belongingness. Very happy people have happier memories of events and have more highly satisfying relationships with friends, romantic partners, and family members.

### Kindness, Gratitude and Happiness

In our everyday life, we depend on reciprocity, the responsiveness of others to our needs. Some people benefit more from this than others. Happy people feel more grateful when on the receiving end of kindness and are more motivated to be kind, to recognize kindness in others, and to enact kind behaviors in their own daily life. The active “tending and befriending” of others leads to an upward spiral of appreciating and reciprocating kindnesses and gratitude. This is the foundation of our relationships and well-being.

In recent gratitude studies, researchers have looked at the value of gratitude among different populations. It appears that men and women, for example, do not have the same experience of gratitude, and that women may have higher trait gratitude, that is, they are naturally more grateful. Men on the other hand, recognize that they have received a gift of some sort but may in addition feel indebted to the giver. This may be exacerbated by cultural influences and may help explain why women who do kind things for some men don't receive a reciprocal response from them.

### Gratitude and Human Development



Kids saying "Good game"

Gratitude building starts early. Since gratitude is a developmental emotion, the social skills that we teach children help to develop it. Very young children learn that people are grateful for socially desired behaviors and this makes kids willing to behave better most of the time. Praising and thanking a child for desired behaviors is more effective, of course, than punishment. Preschoolers will express gratitude with prompting from an adult, but only a small percentage of these children will spontaneously do so. Those who do so we recognize not only as well mannered, but also socially and emotionally more mature than their younger peers.

**In studies with grade schoolers, children ten years old or older expressed gratitude more than 80% of the time compared to a tiny fraction of six-year-olds.** If your children don't like writing thank you letters, stick with it. It may be that they don't enjoy the writing, or the gift, but it may also be that they just aren't feeling that grateful — yet.

In surveys of school-aged populations, girls tend to be most grateful for interpersonal relationships and boys tend to be most grateful for their material possessions. Further, the indebtedness that some boys feel when a kindness is bestowed upon them may actually keep them from feeling gratitude while they

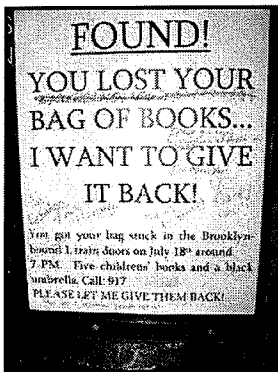
avoid a sense of obligation and even guilt. In a lab setting, people who were induced to feel grateful felt higher life satisfaction and lower desire for more material goods. When participants were induced to feel envious of others' possessions, however, they experienced higher materialism. It's hard to feel grateful, of course, when you focus on people's stuff instead of them. Remember this the next time you are being bombarded (or stealthily seduced) by advertising.

### Gratitude and Relationship Building

Fortunately, among both boys and girls, adolescents who are more grateful regularly have higher subjective well-being, optimism, prosocial behavior, and social support. That's because gratitude promotes relationship formation and its maintenance. When people are kind to us, it shows that they are responding to our whole self, our likes or dislikes, our needs, and our preferences. Gratitude makes both the giver and the receiver happy. In fact, among young women, the more effort it is perceived went into a kindness, the more gratitude the recipient often feels. Relationships built in this way encourage people to create meaningful experiences for others.

Another finding about gratitude that can particularly benefit adolescents is that **feeling grateful before bed leads to improved sleep**. Feeling grateful before bedtime positively affects sleep quality and one's sense of refreshment upon waking. Since gratitude also mediates sleep quality and good sleep quality reduces daytime distraction, feeling grateful may contribute to more time on task.

### You Can Experience More Gratitude



#### Gratitude at the train station

The experience of gratitude prevents us from doing things that would be destructive to our relationships. It helps us experience happiness, hope, pride, and optimism, lets us be in a positive mood more often, feel self-actualized, and have a sense of community. In a school setting, gratitude is related to both academic and school success as well as overall school satisfaction. How can we practice gratitude? Three easy and effective ways include:

- Write a letter of gratitude to someone and delivering it in person to share your gratefulness.
- Keep a gratitude journal. See my article here for more on this.
- Keep a "counting your kindnesses" journal. Noticing the number and the ways you are kind makes you both happier and more likely to do even more kind things that set up the positive relationship cycle.

Make yourself happier and make the world a better place. As you go into the world today, remember to

tend and befriend, as well as to appreciate and reciprocate!

### Images:

[“Thank you” sign](#) courtesy of psd

[“Good game”](#) by woodleywonderworks

[The L train](#) courtesy of Unkle\_Cheese

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### 11 Comments »



- [Marcial Losada](#) says:  
November 5, 2009 at 5:22 pm

I am married to one of the most grateful persons I've ever known and I can testify to two other side benefits you mention in your excellent article: she sleeps like a baby and has a P/N ratio way above the Losada line. The only problem is that I am not as grateful as she is and oftentimes I find myself awake in the middle of the night. Counting sheep or anything else doesn't help, so I am going to follow your advice and count my blessings instead.



- [Sherri Fisher](#) says:  
November 5, 2009 at 5:56 pm