



13 Strategies Parents Can Use to Raise a Grateful Child By David Bredehoff

I believe that an **Attitude of Gratitude** can be learned. If it is learned, then parents can actively use strategies to teach and raise grateful children. Here are 13 you can try.

1. Be a Grateful Role Model

Remember - you are your children's #1 role model. If you want to have grateful children you will need to be the grateful role model. Find every opportunity to demonstrate your gratefulness, but you need to do it authentically. Children see everything and soak it up. Parents are often shocked at what their children learn, much of it from watching them. So don't just talk the grateful talk.....walk the grateful walk.

2. Resist Overindulging Your Children

Raising children in an age of overindulgence is difficult, but learn to resist buying your children everything they want. Resist overnurturing them. Do set firm rules with reasonable consequences. Expect chores to be done because everyone is expected to contribute to the family. There is more help with this in "[How Much is Too Much?](#)"

3. Teach Them to Say "Thank You"

It is important to teach your children to say "Thank You". Start teaching them when they are young (age 3) and continue until they say "Thank You" without reminders. It is important that it becomes a habit. Also, they need to be sincere when they say "Thank You." Don't encourage a fake "Thank You" if the child doesn't like something.

4. Once or Twice Does Not a Habit Make

Sometimes we forget how many times we need to do something before it becomes automatic, before it becomes a good habit. When teaching your children to say "Thank You" or any other "Grateful Habit" you will need to encourage, remind, and give them positive strokes for it many, many, many times. Once or twice does not a habit make. [Recent research](#) suggests that it takes on average 66 days to create a habit. And this is for adults. What must it be for a 4 or 5 year old? What about a teenager? I wager you it is a lot longer!

5. Teach Respect and Politeness

[Insist on manners.](#) When your son is being disrespectful or impolite, correct him or have him do a redo. When your daughter is being rude, do something. If not, in the long run it will cost them. Kids who are disrespectful and rude are generally not well liked. I may be old-fashioned, but to me the magic words never go out of fashion, "Please", "Thank You", "Excuse Me".

6. Insist They Write Thank You Notes

I think [Miss Manners gets it right.](#) You should teach and insist that your children hand-write thank-you's. It's not hard once you start. One sentence per grade is a good rule of thumb. Send them out



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promptly. If your children are very young, have them draw a picture with crayons and sign it best as they are able. That will be a wonderful thank you any grandparent will cherish. As they get older have thank you cards available for them to use. I believe a good family rule about giving gifts to grandchildren, nephews, nieces etc. is **No "Thank You", No More Gifts.**

7. Keep a Gratitude Journal

[Oprah Winfrey](#) knows about the power of gratitude and writing it down. The research on this is convincing too ([p. 213](#)). So get into the habit. Write it down. Be a role model for your children. Share what you've written with them. Encourage them to start their own gratitude journal. It will change their lives!

8. When Your Child is Down or Blue

Have them make a list of 3 or more things that they are grateful for. Right now. This minute. They will find that it is difficult to stay focused on the negative when the positive is right there in front of them.

9. Make Celebrations Part of Your Daily Routine

My coauthor Jean Illsley Clarke taught me a life lesson many years ago - one she calls "Celebrations". She would start group meetings with "Celebrations". Then everyone shared one or more things they were celebrating in the last week. It could be large or small. Amazingly, it sets a positive tone for everything to come after. Make "Celebrations" part of your daily family routine. Try it at dinner tonight.

10. Help Without Being Asked

This is something every parent wishes for! The secret to teaching this habit is an old behavioral trick, "catching them being good". First you share your expectation with your children. "Will you please take out the trash when you see it is full without being told to take it out." Then each time it happens you say something like, "Thank you for taking out the trash. I really appreciate your help. It makes my life so much easier." Remember, "What you stroke is what you get."

11. Learn To Pay All or Part of Your Way

Occasionally ask your children to pay "all" or "part". This is a valuable lesson for them to learn. It is one of the most valuable lessons I learned from my mother. If you want something bad enough you will have to work for it. I was ten years old and wanted a new shiny bicycle. Mom and dad bought me a used bike the year before, but I wanted a new one. Mom told me, "Dave, the bike we bought you for Christmas was all we could afford. If you want a new one you will have to earn it. I understand they are hiring paperboys down at the newspaper. You could get a job and earn the money yourself." And that's exactly what I did. Thank you Mom!

12. Encourage Them to Give Back

Encourage your children to give back. I am a fan of [Nathan Dungan's](#) simple but elegant concept



of "Share" "Save" "Spend". All the money children receive from gifts, allowance, work etc. are first put into one pot. Then parents decide what percentage of the pot their children will "Share", what percentage they will "Save", and what percentage they will "Save" Next, I suggest you have your children, explore and find a charity or cause they are excited about. They will become as passionate as the 18,000 students that got together in St. Paul to celebrate "[We Day](#)". Their causes ranged from buying goats for women in Kenya to raising money for housing for homeless students.

13. Lead a Life of Service: Volunteer

Remember - you are your children's #1 role model. Lead by example. Lead a Life of Service. Many adults do this by volunteering. Find an organization or cause you are passionate about.

While at Concordia University - St. Paul, for 25 years, my wife and I along with fellow colleagues and students volunteered to make and serve breakfast for 300-400 homeless men, women, and children once a month at the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul. Never in all of those years did I walk away thinking, "Why am I doing this?" Instead, something extraordinary happened; my life was enriched. Each time I felt an even deeper sense of gratitude for my life and everyone in it.

Gratitude is Like Planting a Garden

Gratitude, just like a garden, starts with tilling the soil, planting the seed, watering, fertilizing, and nurturing. Then step back and watch as loveliness grows all around you.

