



Express Gratitude

Children who care about the feelings of others can learn to express those feelings... even if they do not seem comfortable at it during this stage of their development. They not only understand gestures of kindness and caring that others extend to them (a hug, a smile, a handshake, a high-five, for example), but they also know how people respond positively when they extend the same kindness! To be able to express appreciation, children's own natural empathy must be encouraged, so they are aware of the feelings of others. Expressions of gratitude will stimulate an emotional reaction in your child that will encourage him to continue saying "thanks" in his own special way.

Feeling grateful for what he receives, for what's done for him, or for having you around is probably something that your child experiences from time to time. But good social skills require that he be able to say how grateful he is. His expressions of thankfulness can be combined with practice in writing, by having him draw "thank-you pictures" to express

his affection to you, to his grandmother, or this teacher, for example. For non-writers, ask your child what he wants to say, write it out for him, and ask him

to copy what you've written; or he could draw a picture of what he's grateful for, and you could write down what he wants to say about it.

Ways to practice this habit together:

- **Model expressions of appreciation.** When you say "thank you" to your child for what he does, he will learn the good feelings that come from receiving your thanks and will learn from you how to give thanks to others. Gently remind him that expressing gratitude helps everyone feel good – the giver (you!) and the receiver (him!).
- **Make expressing appreciation a priority for you and your child.** Tell your child how important it is to acknowledge others' kindnesses, such as saying "thanks" for a gift, calling an Aunt on the phone to say how much you love the doll she gave her, or sending drawings to Grandma to express how much she loved her visit. When you prioritize this every time your child receives something (a birthday, a holiday, a special occasion), the behavior becomes routine, a habit that is not questioned (although it may be griped about!) Doing so helps your child get in touch with her feelings, develop social skills, and help her think about the recipient's feelings when the picture or phone call is received.
- **Use privileges as motivation to draw the picture, make the call or give a hug by saying, "When you have drawn a picture for Grandpa, then you can go outside and play."**
- **Always require the writing of thank-you notes when your child receives something as a gift, has been invited to a party, or has been a guest.** Thank-you notes help him get in touch with his feelings, as well as develop his social skills.
- **Praise expressions of kindness.** Giving your child praise for saying thanks to those who give him presents or do him favors will encourage him to repeat this caring habit. It will serve him well to build positive relationships throughout his life. Everyone appreciates being appreciated!
- **Use privileges as motivation** to write the thank-you note by saying that when he has written the note, then he may go play.