

Solutions Newsletter

November 2021



Effective School
Solutions

Solutions is a newsletter published by ESS for parents, guardians, and caretakers. Each issue highlights an important topic related to children's mental health and provides practical applications for parents in the home environment.

Revisiting the Many Benefits of Gratitude

Regular readers of **Solutions** may have noticed that "gratitude" appears quite frequently as the topic for our November issue. Not only does November bring our official holiday for giving thanks, it also ushers in a holiday season that for many is associated with enjoying family and friends, offering tokens of love and appreciation, and reflecting about the year past and making resolutions for the year to come. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many families have experienced illness and death, extreme financial hardship, and/or life-altering disruptions to daily routines, making it more difficult, and perhaps more important than ever, to foster gratitude in your children and yourselves.

Every year researchers who specialize in "Positive Psychology" gather more and more evidence about the relationship between mental health and various character strengths and virtues, including curiosity, open-mindedness, forgiveness, kindness, humor, and the capacity for appreciation/gratitude. Gratitude is defined as an acknowledgment of the meaning and value of something, and a positive emotional connection to it, and its benefits can be organized into 5 different categories: Emotional, Social, Personality, Career, and Health.

- Emotional – Gratitude can increase positive emotions and a sense of well-being, improve self-esteem, and serve as a protective factor from suicidal thoughts and impulses.
- Social – Gratitude can improve friendships and romantic relationships, strengthen family relationships, and increase social support, likely because **being grateful** affects how trustworthy, social, and appreciative we seem to others.
- Personality – Gratitude increases optimism and spirituality, decreases materialism, and makes us more likely to help, give, and share with others.
- Career – Gratitude can improve praise-giving, decision-making, and motivational skills, increase the sense of meaning in one's work, and decrease work-related stress.
- Health – Gratitude has been shown to improve sleep, reduce blood pressure, reduce depression, and improve overall health.

Studies have shown that it can be quite easy to increase gratitude in children, so parents may want to consider some simple activities to help their children become more grateful. For example, parents might challenge their children (and themselves) to identify unexpected "silver linings" that have appeared because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These might include more time with family, a break from overcommitted and hectic schedules, time to work on home-based projects, increased practice in valuing "being" over "doing", and time to re-assess and adjust one's goals and priorities. The pandemic has also increased appreciation for the many challenges of parenthood and the mental health struggles of youngsters and has led to an increase in school-based mental health services.

Some simple activities that parents can use to teach and increase children's gratefulness are:

- Encourage your child to keep a gratitude journal. Each day ask the child to write down one or two SMALL things that he/she is grateful for that day: a delicious meal, a compliment from a friend, fun with a pet, a sibling's help with chores, a funny video, etc. Schedule a weekly "count your blessings" time when family members can share their journal entries with each other.
- Help your child plan and complete "gratitude activities": e.g., write a detailed "thank you" letter to someone who has helped you in life, or regularly tell people in your life that you appreciate them. BE SPECIFIC: "your words today encouraged me", "you gave me a great tip about my game performance", "your smile makes me happy", "I love the song that you recommended".
- Encourage your child to seek experiences that bring about awe or wonder, e.g., spending time in nature; suggest drawing or photographing, and then sharing, what they saw.

Resources:

[28 Benefits of Gratitude & Most Significant Research Findings \(positivepsychology.com\)](https://www.positivepsychology.com)