

# Social and Emotional Learning Experiences for Students and Families

## This week's focus: Gratitude

The word gratitude has **its origins from** the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people **recognize and appreciate** the things they have or are thankful for. In the process, people usually understand that the source of that goodness was due to **something outside their control**. As a result, being grateful also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals — whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.



During the beginning of the pandemic, I was certainly not happy when restaurants and stores were immediately closed. The curfew made it even worse when I was bored from being in the house all day. One day, I started thinking differently about my situation. I started intentionally looking for things throughout the day that made me happy and grateful. I started thinking to myself, what have I gained as a result of this unique situation? Here are some of the answers that I found to that question:

- I am able to spend more time with my family.
- I am saving more money because I am not out spending it at restaurants and shops.
- I don't have to leave the house to go to school.
- I can exercise more during the day.
- I am less stressed about getting everything done because I have more time since I am at home.
- I'm really a lot happier because I don't have as many responsibilities outside of work life and home life.

True happiness **is rooted in gratitude**. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, enjoy good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships. **People feel and express gratitude in several ways**. They can apply it **to past-experiences** (retrieving positive memories and being thankful for elements of childhood or past blessings), **a present situation** (not taking good fortune for granted as it comes), or **to a desired outcome in the future** (maintaining a hopeful and optimistic attitude). Regardless of the inherent or current level of someone's gratitude, it's a quality that individuals can always develop or practice.

What I have learned over the past year or so is that gratitude is about your attitude. Gratitude is something that has to be practiced until it becomes a mindset. When gratitude becomes a mindset, it has the power to change our lives from negative to positive, from bad to great. When kids and adults learn how to show gratitude through appreciation, kindness, and thankfulness, they have the

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ability to change the world. Watch this video linked [here](#) to learn more about gratitude.

## Ways to cultivate gratitude

Gratitude is a way for people to appreciate what they have, instead of always thinking they need more stuff or to have something else to make them happy, successful, or for their life to have meaning. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. And, although it may feel uncomfortable at first, this mental state grows stronger with use and practice.



Here are some ways to cultivate gratitude on a regular basis.

- **Write a thank-you note.** You can make yourself happier and nurture your relationship with another person by [writing a thank-you letter](#) or email expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life. No matter the age, it's always good to receive a thank-you note (in person, by mail, by email). Covid-19 has also given us several virtual options to express our appreciation for others (face time, hangouts, e-cards, etc.). Make a habit of sending at least one gratitude letter a month. Once in a while, write one to yourself.
- **Thank someone mentally.** No time to write? It may help just to think about someone who has done something nice for you, and mentally thank the individual.
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** Make it a habit to write down or share with a loved one thoughts about the gifts you've received each day.
- **Capturing the moment.** Take or share a picture of a meaningful moment and explain why that person, gift, care, family members, etc. is so important to you.
- **Count your blessings.** Pick a time every week to sit down and write about your blessings — reflecting on what went right or what you are grateful for. Sometimes it helps to pick a number — such as three to five things — that you will identify each week. As you write, be specific and think about the sensations you felt when something good happened to you.
- **Pray.** People who are religious can use prayer to cultivate gratitude.
- **Meditate.** Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on the present moment without judgment. Although people often focus on a word or phrase (such as "peace"), it is also possible to focus on what you're grateful for (the warmth of the sun, a pleasant sound, etc.).

(Source: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>).

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## 12 Gratitude Questions to Ask Your Students

(Source: <https://empoweringeducation.org/blog/two-weeks-of-classroom-gratitude/>)

1. Name a food you're grateful for. Any specific reason?
2. Name a place in the neighborhood or in your home that you're grateful for. Why?
3. Name a person in school with whom you don't talk a lot but who you think is admirable. Why?
4. What is your favorite time of day? Why?
5. What's something that you own that you're grateful for? Why?
6. What's something that happened to you in the past year that you're grateful for? Why are you grateful for that event?
7. What holiday do you like the most? Why?
8. What's a song or movie that makes you happy? Why?
9. What's your favorite season of the year? Why?
10. What's something about your body that you're grateful for?
11. What's something that's been hard for you but that you're grateful for? Why?
12. Who is a person who has been helpful to you? How?

