

COMMENTARY

Attitude of gratitude aids character, academic growth



MARY MASSEY

The holiday season is a busy time for many families, with a full schedule of activities on the to-do list including shopping, baking and visiting relatives. However, it's important to talk to children about what they're thankful for during these months, and encourage an attitude of gratitude.

Given today's social pressures on fame, money, and status, kids may not always see examples of gratitude on TV and in pop culture. The holidays can be a good time to start new family traditions or have conversations with children about thankfulness.

Remember the story about the origin of the Thanksgiving holiday? Pilgrims who came to America for a better life joined their Native American friends for a feast, giving thanks to the Native Americans for helping them survive and plant crops. Many other holiday traditions, such as Christmas and Hanukkah, also involve the feelings of gratitude and thankfulness.

Grateful children, according to recent studies, have a better chance of being emotionally, physically, and socially successful. Gratitude is also viewed as an instrumental virtue for other character traits helpful for students to succeed in school.

One of the leading researchers on the subject, Dr. Jeffrey Froh, Associate Professor of Psychology at New York's Hofstra University, looked at the impact of teaching gratitude to students and found it improved academic achievement.

"They report better relationships with friends and family, higher GPAs,

less materialism, less envy and less depression, along with a desire to connect to their community and to want to give back," Froh said.

Many experts agree that teaching thankfulness starts at home. Noted psychologist and TV personality Joyce Brothers once said, "feeling gratitude isn't born in us -- it's something we are taught, and in turn, we teach our children."

Even though the holidays can be hectic for families, it's a good idea to set aside some time to demonstrate thankfulness.

Here are a few simple and creative activities to help children embrace a spirit of gratitude:

Artwork for appreciation

Thanksgiving place mats -- A timely way to help your child count their blessings is having them make place mats for family and friends coming to Thanksgiving dinner or another holiday meal. Glue or tape two pieces of construction paper together, then ask your child to personalize with hand written messages of thanks, photos, leaves, stickers or other creative elements.

Garland of gratitude -- String some fresh or artificial garland along your student's desk or on a favorite wall in the house, and add a few brightly colored clothespins throughout. Have your child cut up colored paper for notecards and write down one thing they are thankful for on each card. Your student can decorate the cards before attaching them to the garland for a festive and thoughtful holiday display.

Chain of thanks -- Remember the old-fashioned homemade paper chains on Christmas trees? Now you can revive

that tradition and involve the whole family in the gift of gratitude. Cut up strips of decorative paper and ask all family members to write down things they are thankful for on the strips. Then plan a paper chain party so you can assemble the strips into chains, and decorate the house in gratefulness.

Your family can also start some gratitude challenges during the holiday season that can easily be reused year-round:

Recording gratitude creatively

Gratitude jar -- Designate a large jar or basket for this project and label it the "Gratitude Jar." Place paper and pencil next to the jar and ask children to write something they're thankful for each day and put it in the jar. Once every week or so, pass the jar around at dinner and let family members draw submissions, reflecting on the topic drawn.

Gratitude poster or book -- For longer lasting memories, get a piece of poster board and write at the top: "For This I am Grateful." Encourage students and other family members to write what they are thankful for, adding photos or other artwork. The poster is another good conversation starter at dinnertime. A scrapbook for the coffee table can also serve the same purpose, but contains more photos and can be started as a project to kick off the New Year.

Joy journal -- Communicating gratefulness can be hard for young children, so have them jot down their thoughts in a gratitude journal to help organize their ideas. Sit down with your child every evening and have them write a couple of positive things from the day. Soon they'll start to appreciate the good in their life, big and small.

Thank-you notes -- A short note of

thanks goes a long way sometimes. Lead by example -- put a note of appreciation in your child's lunchbox. Then show your children how to write notes of gratitude for people that have done something deserving of thanks. Writing thank you notes for gifts they received over the holidays is another way to practice gratefulness.

Good role models -- It's one thing to tell your child to say "thank you," it's another for them to see gratitude in action. Children absorb behaviors from grown-ups, so walk the walk and make sure your kids see you demonstrating gratitude with others. Help your student understand that it feels great to be on the receiving end of gratitude too. Catch your student doing random acts of kindness, like an extra chore and express appreciation for going above and beyond.

Every child will learn and demonstrate gratitude in different forms as they grow, each will follow their own path. The more parents incorporate thankfulness into daily life though, the more it will sink in. A thankful child could potentially become a happier, more grateful adult.

Families looking for something special to give their students this holiday season might consider the gift of gratitude and try a few of these tips. Who knows, the lasting rewards could be better manners, better grades, better physical and mental health, plus the added benefit of having some new thankfulness family traditions!

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Oregon cities setting rules after opting in to legal pot

ANDREW SELSKY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Some 30 counties and cities in Oregon approved some type of marijuana businesses in last week's election, and officials in those communities now must establish rules for every step in the production and supply chain.

When voters legalized recreational marijuana statewide two years ago, the communities -- from the cowboy town of Pendleton to Sweet Home in the Willamette Valley -- opted out. But many switched it up this month, voting to allow at least some form of the pot industry, including medical marijuana.

"No one has done this in Oregon since liquor prohibition," said Scott Winkels, a lobbyist with the League of Oregon Cities. "This is the first time we've had to step in and develop and regulate a marketplace for a controlled substance since

1933." Local officials must determine operating hours for marijuana retailers, growing farms and processors. They also were trying to figure out whether the businesses should be allowed near parks and what sort of security and odor controls the businesses must provide.

The rule-setting also was happening in other states that have legalized recreational marijuana.

In California, which approved pot last week, the San Jose City Council imposed a temporary ban -- including on outdoor gardens -- to give officials time to develop regulations for sales and farming.

In Colorado, where voters passed marijuana in 2012, the rules were still being tweaked.

This month, Denver became the first U.S. city to allow people to use marijuana in bars and restaurants, though state licensing officials announced a rule Fri-

day that prohibits businesses with liquor licenses from allowing pot consumption on their premises. The move strikes a major blow to the voter-passed initiative.

In Oregon, the Liquor Control Commission didn't begin finalizing regulations and licensing businesses until this year. Now, the communities are starting.

"Most have been borrowing from each other," said Rob Bovett, legal counsel of Association of Oregon Counties, describing efforts to establish ordinances.

Opt-in ballot measures go into effect in January, Bovett said. If the jurisdictions want to reap the tax benefits at the earliest opportunity, they should have the regulations finalized before then so marijuana companies can seek licenses and start doing business, liquor commission spokesman Mark Pettinger said.

The League of Oregon Cities has drawn up a guide to help struggling local

officials. It says cities may impose restrictions on the hours of operation and the locations of producers, processors, wholesalers, as well as retailers and medical marijuana grow sites, processing sites and dispensaries. They may also regulate public access and how the businesses operate.

"Probably most cities will use (the guide) as a template," Winkels said. "The easiest way is to cut and paste the ordinance in ... though some will probably be making local adjustments."

Robert Snyder, lawyer for the town of Sweet Home, said forming the rules is "going to take work" and that it will be up to the city council to decide whether to get public input.

One marijuana ballot measure that passed imposed a 3 percent local sales tax on marijuana products, on top of a 17 percent state sales tax, Bovett said.

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