

Gratitude

Often when we realize the holiday season is upon us it's the first week of December and we are in shock. Wham! Out of no where Halloween has come and gone, and now we need to make our list, check it twice, three times, and once more for the upcoming holidays. Take a deep breath, sit back, and as you organize your busy November and December calendars, take a moment to reflect on all you are and all you have, and take in how grateful you feel.

This holiday season I'd like to encourage you to focus on real joy. This kind of joy comes from deep within you. Real joy is a lot more than happiness. Feeling happy is awesome, don't get me wrong. But happiness often comes with the success of losing weight, buying a car, falling in love. Sustained joy is true peace for you and your family, a feeling without worry and without fear. As we make it through the long work days and shopping filled nights, remember to take quiet moments for yourself and your children. During these baths or sitting times, use deep breathing and a reflection of everything that went well that day, and how very thankful you feel. Even in the midst of the worst case scenarios, arguments, job losses, illnesses - you can still find something to be grateful for and then you no longer feel alone or victimized. We have the choice to be grateful no matter what the situation or what the problem. It is our responsibility to empower our children, as well, to make such choices. It's true that we can't control every situation in our lives, but we can control how we respond to them. By finding something to be grateful for in the middle of turmoil, (standing strong in the midst of the storm), we will feel better and be more likely to make our way through clearly and successfully.

Gratitude journals have recently become quite common. Whether you review what you are thankful for in your head, or if you choose to write down five things a day that you are thankful for, it will change the way you see the world. It is true that our dominant thoughts become our reality. Don't wait for things to happen in your life, you need to happen to your life. Direct your life by being grateful for everything you've got. It is so easy for us to compare ourselves to those who have more than us, bigger houses, better cars, but take a moment to compare yourself to those less fortunate than you. This alone will fill your heart with overwhelming gratitude, and a desire to help those in need.

Brenda Shoshanna, Ph.D., a psychologist and author of *365 Ways to Give Thanks*, suggests a daily exercise called Naikan. At the end of each day consider three questions: 1. What did I receive today? (A wonderful tasting bagel, a kiss from my daughter, a beautiful skyline). 2. What did I give today? (A kind word, a smile, a spot in front of me in traffic). 3. What trouble or pain did I cause today? (This allows reflection on how we treated others and not necessarily all about me, me, me). These questions are great to pose to your children during dinner time. If nothing else, play a quick game of "What was the very best part of your day?" Go around the table and allow everyone a chance to answer. Within the pre-schools we have DEAR time, Drop Everything And Read. This is an opportunity for all children and teachers to finish up what they are doing, select a book, and spend time valuing the reading process. Well, the same can be done with your gratitude journals. Everyone at school and home can have DEAW time, when they Drop Everything And Write. Younger children can use this time to draw what they are most thankful for.

So as you make your way through this wonderful time of year, remember to take time to light a candle, smell the spruce trees, look into your children's eyes, and say thank you. Keeping Christ in your holidays is easy with a grateful attitude.

In the words of the 13th century German mystic Meister Eckhart: "If the only prayer you ever say . . . is Thank You, it will be enough!"

Two great gift ideas, which encourage gratitude in attitude: Simple Abundance - A Daybook of Comfort and Joy and 365 Ways to Give Thanks!

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