



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

Like all skills, gratitude is best learned young

As Thanksgiving approaches, it is the perfect time to teach young children a very important life lesson: gratitude.

Barbara Lewis, author of *What Do You Stand For? For Kids*, teaches us children as young as 2 are aware that other people do things for them or give them things that make them happy. As children grow, this awareness turns into an understanding of higher concepts, such as kindness and caring. As they mature further, they will learn to empathize and appreciate the feelings of others – crucial skills for all adults.

So, how do we teach our children to be grateful? Some tips gathered from child development experts and websites include:

- **Teach children to say thank you to everyone who does something for them** – their server at a restaurant, the older sibling who helps them pick up toys, or the friend who buys them a birthday gift.
- **Talk about the things you are grateful for.** This can be everything from a blessing before dinner to reciting evening prayers.
- **Involve kids in chores at home.** Nothing makes children appreciate the time and effort that goes in to different activities like doing the work themselves.
- **Support a charitable event or organization.** Whether you are donating old clothes or toys, participating in a food drive, or even baking cookies for a new neighbor, talk to children about what those actions means to those who receive the kindness.
- **Say no.** It's hard to teach gratitude to someone who gets everything they want.
- **Be consistent.** Like all skills, gratitude is not learned in one lesson.

The first five years offer the opportunity for children to develop the skills they need to be successful students and successful adults. Research shows that thankful people are usually more optimistic and are less depressed and stressed. So, when we teach our children to appreciate what they have – and what others do for them – we are helping them to become happier, healthier adults.

For more tips and tools for supporting quality and healthy development in the first five years, visit www.FirstThingsFirstAZ.gov.